THE COMEDY OF HUMAN LIFE

By H. DE BALZAC

SCENES FROM PARISIAN LIFE

THE DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS

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TRANSLATED BY

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THE DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS

WITH

AN EPISODE UNDER THE TERROR, THE ILLUSTRIOUS GAUDISSART, A PASSION IN THE DESERT, AND THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE



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To FRANZ LISTZ.

SCENES FROM PARISIAN LIFE.

THE DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS.[1]

I.

In a Spanish town on an island of the Mediterranean there is a convent of the Bare-footed Carmelites, where the rule of the Order instituted by Saint Theresa is still kept with the primitive rigor of the reformation brought about by that illustrious woman. Extraordinary as this fact may seem, it is true. Though the monasteries of the Peninsula and those of the Continent were nearly all destroyed or broken up by the outburst of the French Revolution and the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars, yet on this island, protected by the British fleets, the wealthy convent and its peaceful inmates were sheltered from the dangers of change and general spoliation. The storms from all quarters which shook the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century subsided ere they reached this lonely rock near the coast of Andalusia. If the name of the great Emperor echoed fitfully upon its shores, it may be doubted whether the fantastic march of his glory or the flaming majesty of his meteoric life ever reached the comprehension of those saintly women kneeling in their distant cloister.

[1] The Duchesse de Langeais is one of the series of three stories called "Histoire Des Treize."

A conventual rigor, which was never relaxed, gave to this haven a special place in the thoughts and history of the Catholic world. The purity of its rule drew to its shelter from different parts of Europe sad women, whose souls deprived of human ties longed for the death in life which they found here in the bosom of God. No other convent was so fitted to wean the heart and teach it that aloofness from the things of this world which the religious life imperatively demands. On the Continent may be found a number of such Houses, nobly planned to meet the wants of their sacred purpose. Some are buried in the depths of solitary valleys; others hang, as it were, in mid-air above the hills, clinging to the mountain slopes or projecting from the verge of precipices. On all sides man has sought out the poesy of the infinite, the solemnity of silence: he has sought God; and on the mountain-tops, in the abyssmal depths, among the caverned cliffs, he has found Him. Yet nowhere as on this European islet, half African though it be, can he find such differing harmonies all blending to lift the soul and quell its springs of anguish; to cool its fevers, and give to the sorrows of life a bed of rest.

The monastery is built at the extremity of the island at its highest part, where the rock by some convulsion of Nature has been rent sharply down to the sea, and presents at all points keen angles and edges, slightly eaten away at the water-line by the action of the waves, but insurmountable to all approach. The rock is also protected from assault by dangerous reefs running far out from its base, over which frolic the blue waters of the Mediterranean. It is only from the sea that the

visitor can perceive the four principal parts of the square structure, which adheres minutely as to shape, height, and the piercing of its windows to the prescribed laws of monastic architecture. On the side towards the town the church hides the massive lines of the cloister, whose roof is covered with large tiles to protect it from winds and storms, and also from the fierce heat of the sun. The church, the gift of a Spanish family, looks down upon the town and crowns it. Its bold yet elegant façade gives a noble aspect to the little maritime city. Is it not a picture of terrestrial sublimity? See the tiny town with clustering roofs, rising like an amphitheatre from the picturesque port upward to the noble Gothic frontal of the church, from which spring the slender shafts of the bell-towers with their pointed finials: religion dominating life; offering to man the end and the way of living, — image of a thought altogether Spanish. Place this scene upon the bosom of the Mediterranean beneath an ardent sky; plant it with palms whose waving fronds mingle their green life with the sculptured leafage of the immutable architecture; look at the white fringes of the sea as it runs up the reef and they sparkle upon the sapphire of its wave; see the galleries and the terraces built upon the roofs of houses, where the inhabitants come at eve to breathe the flower-scented air as it rises through the tree-tops from their little gardens. Below, in the harbor, are the white sails. The serenity of night is coming on; listen to the notes of the organ, the chant of evening orisons, the echoing bells of the ships at sea: on all sides sound and peace, — oftenest peace.

Within the church are three naves, dark and mysterious. The fury of the winds evidently forbade the architect to build out lateral buttresses, such as adorn all other cathedrals, and between which little chapels are usually constructed. Thus the strong walls which flank the lesser naves shed no light into the building. Outside, their gray masses are shored up from point to point by enormous beams. The great nave and its two small lateral galleries are lighted solely by the rose-window of stained glass, which pierces with miraculous art the wall above the great portal, whose fortunate exposure permits a wealth of tracery and dentellated stonework belonging to that order of architecture miscalled Gothic.

The greater part of the three naves is given up to the inhabitants of the town who come to hear Mass and the Offices of the Church. In front of the choir is a latticed screen, within which brown curtains hang in ample folds, slightly parted in the middle to give a limited view of the altar and the officiating priest. The screen is divided at intervals by pillars that hold up a gallery within the choir which contains the organ. This construction, in harmony with the rest of the building, continues, in sculptured wood, the little columns of the lateral galleries which are supported by the pillars of the great nave. Thus it is impossible for the boldest curiosity, if any such should dare to mount the narrow balustrade of these galleries, to see farther into the choir than the octagonal stained windows which pierce the apse behind the high altar.

At the time of the French expedition into Spain for the purpose of re-establishing the authority of Ferdinand

VII., and after the fall of Cadiz, a French general who was sent to the island to obtain its recognition of the royal government prolonged his stay upon it that he might reconnoitre the convent and gain, if possible, admittance there. The enterprise was a delicate one. But a man of passion, — a man whose life had been, so to speak, a series of poems in action, who had lived romances instead of writing them; above all, a man of deeds, — might well be tempted by a project apparently so impossible. To open for himself legally the gates of a convent of women! The Pope and the Metropolitan Archbishop would scarcely sanction it. Should he use force or artifice? In case of failure was he not certain to lose his station and his military future, besides missing his aim? The Duc d'Angoulême was still in Spain; and of all the indiscretions which an officer in favor with the commander-in-chief could commit, this alone would be punished without pity. The general had solicited his present mission for the purpose of following up a secret hope, albeit no hope was ever so despairing. This last effort, however, was a matter of conscience. The house of these Bare-footed Carmelites was the only Spanish convent which had escaped his search. While crossing from the mainland, a voyage which took less than an hour, a strong presentiment of success had seized his heart. Since then, although he had seen nothing of the convent but its walls, nothing of the nuns, not so much as their brown habit; though he had heard only the echoes of their chanted liturgies, — he had gathered from those walls and from these chants faint indications that seemed to justify his fragile hope. Slight as the auguries thus capriciously awakened

might be, no human passion was ever more violently roused than the curiosity of this French general To the heart there are no insignificant events; it magnifies all things; it puts in the same balance the fall of an empire and the fall of a woman's glove, — and oftentimes the glove outweighs the empire. But let us give the facts in their actual simplicity: after the facts will come the feelings.

An hour after the expedition had landed on the island the royal authority was re-established. A few Spaniards who had taken refuge there after the fall of Cadiz embarked on a vessel which the general allowed them to charter for their voyage to London. There was thus neither resistance nor reaction. This little insular restoration could not, however, be accomplished without a Mass, at which both companies of the troops were ordered to be present. Not knowing the rigor of the Carmelite rule, the general hoped to gain in the church some information about the nuns who were immured in the convent, one of whom might be a being dearer to him than life, more precious even than honor. His hopes were at first cruelly disappointed. Mass was celebrated with the utmost pomp. In honor of this solemn occasion the curtains which habitually hid the choir were drawn aside, and gave to view the rich ornaments, the priceless pictures, and the shrines incrusted with jewels whose brilliancy surpassed that of the votive offerings fastened by the mariners of the port to the pillars of the great nave. The nuns, however, had retired to the seclusion of the organ gallery.

Yet in spite of this check, and while the Mass of thanksgiving was being sung, suddenly and secretly the

drama widened into an interest as profound as any that ever moved the heart of man. The Sister who played the organ roused an enthusiasm so vivid that not one soldier present regretted the order which had brought him to the church. The men listened to the music with pleasure; the officers were carried away by it. As for the general, he remained to all appearance calm and cold: the feelings with which he heard the notes given forth by the nun are among the small number of earthly things whose expression is withheld from impotent human speech, but which — like death, like God, like eternity — can be perceived only at their slender point of contact with the heart of man. By a strange chance the music of the organ seemed to be that of Rossini, — a composer who more than any other has carried human passion into the art of music, and whose works by their number and extent will some day inspire an Homeric respect. From among the scores of this fine genius the nun seemed to have chiefly studied that of Moses in Egypt; doubtless because the feelings of sacred music are there carried to the highest pitch. Perhaps these two souls — one so gloriously European, the other unknown — had met together in some intuitive perception of the same poetic thought. This idea occurred to two officers now present, true *dilettanti*, who no doubt keenly regretted the Théatre Favart in their Spanish exile. At last, at the Te Deum, it was impossible not to recognize a French soul in the character which the music suddenly took on. The triumph of his Most Christian Majesty evidently roused to joy the heart of that cloistered nun. Surely she was a Frenchwoman. Presently the patriotic spirit burst forth, sparkling like

a jet of light through the antiphonals of the organ, as the Sister recalled melodies breathing the delicacy of Parisian taste, and blended them with vague memories of our national anthems. Spanish hands could not have put into this graceful homage paid to victorious arms the fire that thus betrayed the origin of the musician.

"France is everywhere!" said a soldier.

The general left the church during the Te Deum; it was impossible for him to listen to it. The notes of the musician revealed to him a woman loved to madness; who had buried herself so deeply in the heart of religion, hid herself so carefully away from the sight of the world, that up to this time she had escaped the keen search of men armed not only with immense power, but with great sagacity and intelligence. The hopes which had wakened in the general's heart seemed justified as he listened to the vague echo of a tender and melancholy air, "La Fleuve du Tage," — a ballad whose prelude he had often heard in Paris in the boudoir of the woman he loved, and which this nun now used to express, amid the joys of the conquerors, the suffering of an exiled heart. Terrible moment! to long for the resurrection of a lost love; to find that love — still lost; to meet it mysteriously after five years in which passion, exasperated by the void, had been intensified by the useless efforts made to satisfy it.

Who is there that has not, once at least in his life, upturned everything about him, his papers and his receptacles, taxing his memory impatiently as he seeks some precious lost object; and then felt the ineffable pleasure of finding it after days consumed in the search,

after hoping and despairing of its recovery, — spending upon some trifle an excitement of mind almost amounting to a passion? Well, stretch this fury of search through five long years; put a woman, a heart, a love in the place of the insignificant trifle; lift the passion into the highest realms of feeling; and then picture to yourself an ardent man, a man with the heart of lion and the front of Jove, one of those men who command, and communicate to those about them, respectful terror, — you will then understand the abrupt departure of the general during the Te Deum, at the moment when the prelude of an air, once heard in Paris with delight under gilded ceilings, vibrated through the dark naves of the church by the sea.

He went down the hilly street which led up to the convent, without pausing until the sonorous echoes of the organ could no longer reach his ear. Unable to think of anything but of the love that like a volcanic eruption rent his heart, the French general only perceived that the Te Deum was ended when the Spanish contingent poured from the church. He felt that his conduct and appearance were open to ridicule, and he hastily resumed his place at the head of the cavalcade, explaining to the alcalde and to the governor of the town that a sudden indisposition had obliged him to come out into the air. Then it suddenly occurred to him to use the pretext thus hastily given, as a means of prolonging his stay on the island. Excusing himself on the score of increased illness, he declined to preside at the banquet given by the authorities of the island to the French officers, and took to his bed, after writing to the major-general that a passing illness compelled him

to turn over his command to the colonel. This commonplace artifice, natural as it was, left him free from all duties and able to seek the fulfilment of his hopes. Like a man essentially Catholic and monarchical, he inquired the hours of the various services, and showed the utmost interest in the duties of religion, — a piety which in Spain excited no surprise.

II.

The following day, while the soldiers were embarking, the general went up to the convent to be present at vespers. He found the church deserted by the townspeople, who in spite of their natural devotion were attracted to the port by the embarkation of the troops. The Frenchman, glad to find himself alone in the church, took pains to make the clink of his spurs resound through the vaulted roof; he walked noisily, and coughed, and spoke aloud to himself, hoping to inform the nuns, but especially the Sister at the organ, that if the French soldiers were departing, one at least remained behind. Was this singular method of communication heard and understood? The general believed it was. In the Magnificat the organ seemed to give an answer which came to him in the vibrations of the air. The soul of the nun floated towards him on the wings of the notes she touched, quivering with the movements of the sound. The music burst forth with power; it glorified the church. This hymn of joy, consecrated by the sublime liturgy of Roman Christianity to the uplifting of the soul in presence of the splendors of the ever-living God, became the utterance of a heart terrified at its own happiness in presence of the splendors of a perishable love, which still lived, and came to move it once more beyond the tomb where this woman had buried herself, to rise again the bride of Christ.

The organ is beyond all question the finest, the most daring, the most magnificent of the instruments created by human genius. It is an orchestra in itself, from which a practised hand may demand all things; for it expresses all things. Is it not, as it were, a coign of vantage, where the soul may poise itself ere it springs into space, bearing, as it flies, the listening mind through a thousand scenes of life towards the infinite which parts earth from heaven? The longer a poet listens to its gigantic harmonies, the more fully will he comprehend that between kneeling humanity and the God hidden by the dazzling rays of the Holy of Holies, the hundred voices of terrestrial choirs can alone bridge the vast distance and interpret to Heaven the prayers of men in all the omnipotence of their desires, in the diversities of their woe, with the tints of their meditations and their ecstasies, with the impetuous spring of their repentance, and the thousand imaginations of their manifold beliefs. Yes! beneath these soaring vaults the harmonies born of the genius of sacred things find a yet unheard-of grandeur, which adorns and strengthens them. Here the dim light, the deep silence, the voices alternating with the solemn tones of the organ, seem like a veil through which the luminous attributes of God himself pierce and radiate.

Yet all these sacred riches now seemed flung like a grain of incense on the frail altar of an earthly love, in presence of the eternal throne of a jealous and avenging Deity. The joy of the nun had not the gravity which properly belongs to the solemnity of the Magnificat. She gave to the music rich and graceful modulations, whose rhythms breathed of human gayety;

her measures ran into the brilliant cadences of a great singer striving to express her love, and the notes rose buoyantly like the carol of a bird by the side of its mate. At moments she darted back into the past, as if to sport there or to weep there for an instant. Her changing moods had something discomposed about them, like the agitations of a happy woman rejoicing at the return of her lover. Then, as these supple strains of passionate emotion ceased, the soul that spoke returned upon itself; the musician passed from the major to the minor key, and told her hearer the story of her present. She revealed to him her long melancholy, the slow malady of her moral being, — every day a feeling crushed, every night a thought subdued, hour by hour a heart burning down to ashes. After soft modulations the music took on slowly, tint by tint, the hue of deepest sadness. Soon it poured forth in echoing torrents the well-springs of grief, till suddenly the higher notes struck clear like the voice of angels, as if to tell to her lost love — lost, but not forgotten — that the reunion of their souls must be in heaven, and only there: hope most precious! Then came the Amen. In that no joy, no tears, nor sadness, nor regrets, but a return to God. The last chord that sounded was grave, solemn, terrible. The musician revealed the nun in the garb of her vocation; and as the thunder of the basses rolled away, causing the hearer to shudder through his whole being, she seemed to sink into the tomb from which for a brief moment she had risen. As the echoes slowly ceased to vibrate along the vaulted roofs, the church, made luminous by the music, fell suddenly into profound obscurity.

The general, carried away by the course of this powerful genius, had followed her, step by step, along her way. He comprehended in their full meaning the pictures that gleamed through that burning symphony; for him those chords told all. For him, as for the Sister, this poem of sound was the future, the past, the present. Music, even the music of an opera, is it not to tender and poetic souls, to wounded and suffering hearts, a text which they interpret as their memories need? If the heart of a poet must be given to a musician, must not poetry and love be listeners ere the great musical works of art are understood? Religion, love, and music: are they not the triple expression of one fact, — the need of expansion, the need of touching with their own infinite the infinite beyond them, which is in the fibre of all noble souls? These three forms of poesy end in God, who alone can unwind the knot of earthly emotion. Thus this holy human trinity joins itself to the holiness of God, of whom we make to ourselves no conception unless we surround him by the fires of love and the golden cymbals of music and light and harmony.

The French general divined that on this desert rock, surrounded by the surging seas, the nun had cherished music to free her soul of the excess of passion that consumed it. Did she offer her love as a homage to God? Did the love triumph over the vows she had made to him? Questions difficult to answer. But, beyond all doubt, the lover had found in a heart dead to the world a love as passionate as that which burned within his own.

When vespers ended he returned to the alcalde's house where he was quartered. Giving himself over, a

willing prey, to the delights of a success long expected, laboriously sought, his mind at first could dwell on nothing else, — he was still loved. Solitude had nourished the love of that heart, just as his own had thriven on the barriers, successively surmounted, which this woman had placed between herself and him. This ecstasy of the spirit had its natural duration; then came the desire to see this woman, to withdraw her from God, to win her back to himself, — a bold project, welcome to a bold man. After the evening repast, he retired to his room to escape questions and think in peace, and remained plunged in deep meditation throughout the night. He rose early and went to Mass. He placed himself close to the latticed screen, his brow touching the brown curtain. He longed to rend it away; but he was not alone, his host had accompanied him, and the least imprudence might compromise the future of his love and ruin his new-found hopes. The organ was played, but not by the same hand; the musician of the last two days was absent from its key-board. All was chill and pale to the general. Was his mistress worn out by the emotions which had wellnigh broken down his own vigorous heart? Had she so truly shared and comprehended his faithful and eager love that she now lay exhausted and dying in her cell? At the moment when such thoughts as these rose in the general's mind, he heard beside him the voice beloved; he knew the clear ring of its tones. The voice, slightly changed by a tremor which gave it the timid grace and modesty of a young girl, detached itself from the volume of song, like the voice of a prima-donna in the harmonies of her final notes. It gave to the ear an impression like the effect to the

eye of a fillet of silver or gold threading a dark frieze. It was indeed she! Still Parisian, she had not lost her gracious charm, though she had forsaken the coronet and adornments of the world for the frontlet and serge of a Carmelite. Having revealed her love the night before in the praises addressed to the Lord of all, she seemed now to say to her lover: "Yes, it is I: I am here. I love forever; yet I am aloof from love. Thou shalt hear me: my soul shall enfold thee; but I must stay beneath the brown shroud of this choir, from which no power can tear me. Thou canst not see me."

"It is she!" whispered the general to himself, as he raised his head and withdrew his hands from his face; for he had not been able to bear erect the storm of feeling that shook his heart as the voice vibrated through the arches and blended with the murmur of the waves. A storm raged without, yet peace was within the sanctuary. The rich voice still caressed the ear, and fell like balm upon the parched heart of the lover; it flowered in the air about him, from which he breathed the emanations of her spirit exhaling love through the aspirations of its prayer.

The alcalde came to rejoin his guest, and found him bathed in tears at the elevation of the Host which was chanted by the nun. Surprised to find such devotion in a French officer, he invited the confessor of the convent to join them at supper, and informed the general, to whom no news had ever given such pleasure, of what he had done. During the supper the general made the confessor the object of much attention, and thus confirmed the Spaniards in the high opinion they had

formed of his piety. He inquired with grave interest the number of the nuns, and asked details about the revenues of the convent and its wealth, with the air of a man who politely wished to choose topics which occupied the mind of the good old priest. Then he inquired about the life led by the sisters. Could they go out? Could they see friends?

"Senhor," said the venerable priest, "the rule is severe. If the permission of our Holy Father must be obtained before a woman can enter a house of Saint Bruno,[1] the like rule exists here. It is impossible for any man to enter a convent of the Bare-footed Carmelites, unless he is a priest delegated by the archbishop for duty in the House. No nun can go out. It is true, however, that the Great Saint, Mother Theresa, did frequently leave her cell. A Mother-superior can alone, under authority of the archbishop, permit a nun to see her friends, especially in case of illness. As this convent is one of the chief Houses of the Order, it has a Mother-superior residing in it. We have several foreigners, — among them a Frenchwoman, Sister Theresa, the one who directs the music in the chapel."

"Ah!" said the general, feigning surprise. "She must have been gratified by the triumph of the House of Bourbon?"

"I told them the object of the Mass; they are always rather curious."

"Perhaps Sister Theresa has some interests in France; she might be glad to receive some news, or ask some questions?"

"I think not; or she would have spoken to me."

[1] Founder of the Order of the Chartreux.

"As a compatriot," said the general, "I should be curious to see — that is, if it were possible, if the superior would consent, if —

"At the grating, even in the presence of the reverend Mother, an interview would be absolutely impossible for any ordinary man, no matter who he was; but in favor of a liberator of a Catholic throne and our holy religion, possibly, in spite of the rigid rule of our Mother Theresa, the rule might be relaxed," said the confessor. "I will speak about it."

"How old is Sister Theresa?" asked the lover, who dared not question the priest about the beauty of the nun.

"She is no longer of any age," said the good old man, with a simplicity which made the general shudder.

III.

The next day, before the *siesta*, the confessor came to tell the general that Sister Theresa and the Mother-superior consented to receive him at the grating that evening before the hour of vespers. After the *siesta*, during which the Frenchman had whiled away the time by walking round the port in the fierce heat of the sun, the priest came to show him the way into the convent.

He was guided through a gallery which ran the length of the cemetery, where fountains and trees and numerous arcades gave a cool freshness in keeping with that still and silent spot. When they reached the end of this long gallery, the priest led his companion into a parlor, divided in the middle by a grating covered with a brown curtain. On the side which we must call public, and where the confessor left the general, there was a wooden bench along one side of the wall; some chairs, also of wood, were near the grating. The ceiling was of wood, crossed by heavy beams of the ever-green oak, without ornament. Daylight came from two windows in the division set apart for the nuns, and was absorbed by the brown tones of the room; so that it barely showed the picture of the great black Christ, and those of Saint Theresa and the Blessed Virgin, which hung on the dark panels of the walls.

The feelings of the general turned, in spite of their violence, to a tone of melancholy. He grew calm in

these calm precincts. Something mighty as the grave seized him beneath these chilling rafters. Was it not the eternal silence, the deep peace, the near presence of the infinite? Through the stillness came the fixed thought of the cloister, — that thought which glides through the air in the half-lights, and is in all things, — the thought unchangeable; nowhere seen, which yet grows vast to the imagination; the all-comprising word, *the peace of God.* It enters there, with living power, into the least religious heart. Convents of men are not easily conceivable; man seems feeble and unmanly in them. He is born to act, to fulfil a life of toil; and he escapes it in his cell. But in a monastery of women what strength to endure, and yet what touching weakness! A man may be pushed by a thousand sentiments into the depths of an abbey; he flings himself into them as from a precipice. But the woman is drawn only by one feeling; she does not unsex herself, — she espouses holiness. You may say to the man, Why did you not struggle? but to the cloistered woman life is a struggle still.

The general found in this mute parlor of the sea-girt convent memories of himself. Love seldom reaches upward to solemnity; but love in the bosom of God, — is there nothing solemn there? Yes, more than a man has the right to hope for in this nineteenth century, with our manners and our customs what they are. The general's soul was one on which such impressions act. His nature was noble enough to forget self-interest, honors, Spain, the world, or Paris, and rise to the heights of feeling roused by this unspeakable termination of his long pursuit. What could be more tragic?

How many emotions held these lovers, reunited at last on this granite ledge far out at sea, yet separated by an idea, an impassable barrier. Look at this man, saying to himself, "Can I triumph over God in that heart?"

A slight noise made him quiver. The brown curtain was drawn back; he saw in the half-light a woman standing, but her face was hidden from him by the projection of a veil, which lay in many folds upon her head. According to the rule of the Order she was clothed in the brown garb whose color has become proverbial. The general could not see the naked feet, which would have told him the frightful emaciation of her body; yet through the thick folds of the coarse robe that swathed her his heart divined that tears and prayers and passion and solitude had wasted her away.

The chill hand of a woman, doubtless the Mother-superior, held back the curtain, and the general, examining this unwelcome witness of the interview, encountered the deep grave eyes of an old nun, very aged, whose clear, even youthful, glance belied the wrinkles that furrowed her pale face.

"Madame la duchesse," he said, in a voice shaken by emotion, to the Sister, who bowed her head, "does your companion understand French?"

"There is no duchess here," replied the nun. "You are in presence of Sister Theresa. The woman whom you call my companion is my Mother in God, my superior here below."

These words humbly uttered by a voice that once harmonized with the luxury and elegance in which this

woman had lived queen of the world of Paris, that fell from lips whose language had been of old so gay, so mocking, struck the general as if with an electric shock.

"My holy Mother speaks only Latin and Spanish," she added.

"I understand neither. Dear Antoinette, make her my excuses."

As she heard her name softly uttered by a man once so hard to her, the nun was shaken by emotion, betrayed only by the light quivering of her veil, on which the light now fully fell.

"My brother," she said, passing her sleeve beneath her veil, perhaps to wipe her eyes, "my name is Sister Theresa."

Then she turned to the Mother, and said to her in Spanish a few words which the general plainly heard. He knew enough of the language to understand it, perhaps to speak it. "My dear Mother, this gentleman presents to you his respects, and begs you to excuse him for not laying them himself at your feet; but he knows neither of the languages which you speak."

The old woman slowly bowed her head; her countenance took an expression of angelic sweetness, tempered, nevertheless, by the consciousness of her power and dignity.

"You know this gentleman?" she asked, with a piercing glance at the Sister.

"Yes, my Mother."

"Retire to your cell, my daughter," said the Superior in a tone of authority.

The general hastily withdrew to the shelter of the curtain, lest his face should betray the anguish these

words cost him; but he fancied that the penetrating eyes of the Superior followed him even into the shadow. This woman, arbiter of the frail and fleeting joy he had won at such cost, made him afraid: he trembled, he whom a triple range of cannon could not shake.

The duchess walked to the door, but there she turned: "My Mother," she said, in a voice horribly calm, "this Frenchman is one of my brothers."

"Remain, therefore, my daughter," said the old woman, after a pause.

The jesuitism of this answer revealed such love and such regret, that a man of less firmness than the general would have betrayed his joy in the midst of a peril so novel to him. But what value could there be in the words, looks, gestures of a love that must be hidden from the eyes of a lynx, the claws of a tiger? The Sister came back.

"You see, my brother," she said, "what I have dared to do that I might for one moment speak to you of your salvation, and tell you of the prayers which day by day my soul offers to heaven on your behalf. I have committed a mortal sin, — I have lied. How many days of penitence to wash out that lie! But I shall suffer for you. You know not, my brother, the joy of loving in heaven, of daring to avow affections that religion has purified, that have risen to the highest regions, that at last we know and feel with the soul alone. If the doctrines — if the spirit of the saint to whom we owe this refuge had not lifted me above the anguish of earth to a world, not indeed where she is, but far above my lower life, I could not have seen you now. But I can see you, I can hear you, and remain calm."

"Antoinette," said the general, interrupting these words, "suffer me to see you — you, whom I love passionately, to madness, as you once would have had me love you."

"Do not call me Antoinette, I implore you: memories of the past do me harm. See in me only the Sister Theresa, a creature trusting all to the divine pity. And," she added, after a pause, "subdue yourself, my brother. Our Mother would separate us instantly if your face betrayed earthly passions, or your eyes shed tears."

The general bowed his head, as if to collect himself; when he again lifted his eyes to the grating he saw between two bars the pale, emaciated, but still ardent face of the nun. Her complexion, where once had bloomed the loveliness of youth, — where once there shone the happy contrast of a pure, clear whiteness with the colors of a Bengal rose, — now had the tints of a porcelain cup through which a feeble light showed faintly. The beautiful hair of which this woman was once so proud was shaven; a white band bound her brows and was wrapped around her face. Her eyes, circled with dark shadows due to the austerities of her life, glanced at moments with a feverish light, of which their habitual calm was but the mask. In a word, of this woman nothing remained but her soul.

"Ah! you will leave this tomb — you, who are my life! You belonged to me; you were not free to give yourself — not even to God. Did you not promise to sacrifice all to the least of my commands? Will you now think me worthy to claim that promise, if I tell you what I have done for your sake? I have sought

you through the whole world. For five years you have been the thought of every instant, the occupation of every hour, of my life. My friends — friends all-powerful as you know — have helped me to search the convent of France, Spain, Italy, Sicily, America. My love has deepened with every fruitless search. Many a long journey I have taken on a false hope. I have spent my life and the strong beatings of my heart about the walls of cloisters. I will not speak to you of a fidelity unlimited. What is it? — nothing compared to the infinitude of my love! If in other days your remorse was real, you cannot hesitate to follow me now."

"You forget that I am not free."

"The duke is dead," he said hastily.

Sister Theresa colored. "May Heaven receive him!" she said, with quick emotion: "he was generous to me. But I did not speak of those ties: one of my faults was my willingness to break them without scruple for you."

"You speak of your vows," cried the general, frowning. "I little thought that anything would weigh in your heart against our love. But do not fear, Antoinette; I will obtain a brief from the Holy Father which will absolve your vows. I will go to Rome; I will petition every earthly power; if God himself came down from heaven I — "

"Do not blaspheme!"

"Do not fear how God would see it! Ah! I wish I were as sure that you will leave these walls with me; that to-night — to-night, you would embark at the feet of these rocks. Let us go to find happiness! I know

not where — at the ends of the earth! With me you will come back to life, to health — in the shelter of my love!"

"Do not say these things," replied the Sister; "you do not know what you now are to me. I love you better than I once loved you. I pray to God for you daily. I see you no longer with the eyes of my body. If you but knew, Armand, the joy of being able, without shame, to spend myself upon a pure love which God protects! You do not know the joy I have in calling down the blessings of heaven upon your head. I never pray for myself: God will do with me according to his will. But you — at the price of my eternity I would win the assurance that you are happy in this world, that you will be happy in another throughout the ages. My life eternal is all that misfortunes have left me to give you. I have grown old in grief; I am no longer young or beautiful. Ah! you would despise a nun who returned to be a woman; no sentiment, not even maternal love, could absolve her. What could you say to me that would shake the unnumbered reflections my heart has made in five long years, — and which have changed it, hollowed it, withered it? Ah! I should have given something less sad to God!

"What can I say to you, dear Antoinette? I will say that I love you; that affection, love, true love, the joy of living in a heart all ours, — wholly ours, without one reservation, — is so rare, so difficult to find, that I once doubted you; I put you to cruel tests. But to-day I love and trust you with all the powers of my soul. If you will follow me I will listen through-

out life to no voice but thine. I will look on no face—"

"Silence, Armand! you shorten the sole moments which are given to us to see each other here below."

"Antoinette! will you follow me?"

"I never leave you. I live in your heart—but with another power than that of earthly pleasure, or vanity, or selfish joy. I live here for you, pale and faded, in the bosom of God. If God is just, you will be happy."

"Phrases! you give me phrases! But if I will to have you pale and faded,—if I cannot be happy unless you are with me? What! will you forever place duties before my love? Shall I never be above all things else in your heart? In the past you put the world, or self—I know not what—above me; to-day it is God, it is my salvation. In this Sister Theresa I recognize the duchess; ignorant of the joys of love, unfeeling beneath a pretence of tenderness! You do not love me! you never loved me!—"

"Oh, my brother!—"

"You will not leave this tomb. You love my soul, you say: well! you shall destroy it forever and ever. I will kill myself—"

"My Mother!" cried the nun, "I have lied to you: this man is my lover."

The curtain fell. The general, stunned, heard the doors close with violence.

"She loves me still!" he cried, comprehending all that was revealed in the cry of the nun. "I will find means to carry her away!"

He left the island immediately, and returned to the headquarters of the army on the peninsula. There he

pleaded continued illness, and obtained leave of absence to return to France.

The following circumstances will explain the situation in which we found the persons whose history we are relating.

IV.

THAT which is called in France the Faubourg Saint-Germain is not a quarter of Paris, nor a sect, nor an institution, nor indeed anything that can be definitely expressed. The Place Royale, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Chaussée d'Antin, all contain mansions where the atmosphere of the Faubourg Saint-Germain reigns. Thus the whole of the faubourg is not in the faubourg. Persons born far from its influence feel it, and affiliate themselves with its spirit; while others, born in its purple, are by nature banished from it. The manners, the forms of speech, in a word the traditions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain have been to Paris for the last forty years what the Court was to it in former days; what the Hôtel Saint-Paul was in the fourteenth century, the Louvre in the fifteenth, the Palais, the Hôtel Rambouillet, and the Place Royale in the sixteenth, and, finally, Versailles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Through all phases of history the Paris of the upper classes and the nobility has had its centre, — just as the Paris of the people has had, and always will have, a quarter of its own. This singular and recurring separation affords matter of reflection for those who seek to observe or to paint the various social strata; and perhaps we may be allowed to search out its causes, not only to explain the characters of our story, but to

subserve important interests, — more important to the future than to the present, unless, indeed, the teachings of experience seem as foolish to political parties as they are to youth.

The great lords, and the men of wealth who imitate the lords, have at all epochs withdrawn their homes from crowded precincts. The Duc d'Uzès built during the reign of Louis XIV., in a corner of Paris then a solitude, the noble hôtel at whose gates he placed the fountain of the Rue Montmartre, — a beneficent act which, in addition to his many virtues, made him an object of such popular veneration that all the people of the quarter followed him to his grave. But no sooner were the fortifications levelled, than the waste ground beyond the boulevard was covered with houses, and the d'Uzès family abandoned their mansion, which is now occupied by a banker. Not long after this the nobility, hampered by the invasion of shops, abandoned the Place Royale and the neighborhood of the busy Parisian centres, to cross the river and breathe at its ease in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where palaces had already risen round the mansion built by Louis XIV. for the Duc de Maine, the Benjamin of his legitimatized sons.

To persons accustomed to the elegancies of life there is little that is more offensive than the tumult, cries, mud, ill-savor, and close quarters of the populous streets of a city. The habits of a shop-keeping or manufacturing quarter are in constant collision with the habits of the great world. Commerce and labor are going to bed just as aristocracy is going to dinner: the one is in noisy activity when the other is in need of repose. Their estimates are on differing scales: that of the one

is all gain; that of the other, lavish expenditure. Thus their manners and customs are diametrically opposed. This is said with no disdainful meaning. An aristocracy is, in a way, the thought of a society, as the middle-class and the working-class are its organism and its action. From this comes the need of different sites and locations for their differing forces; and out of this antagonism grows an apparent antipathy which leads to complicated activities,—all working, however, to a common end. These social oppositions are the logical result of constitutional codes; and people of all classes would think it prodigiously absurd if the Prince de Montmorency chose to live in the Rue Saint-Martin at the corner of the street which bears his name, or if the Duc de Fitz-James, descendant of the royal Scottish race, had his hôtel in the Rue Marie-Stuart near the Rue Montorgueil. *Sint ut sint, aut non sint,*—this fine pontifical saying might serve as a motto for the great world of every nation. The fact, belonging to all epochs and accepted always by the people, bears within it reasons of state; it is at one and the same time an effect and a cause, a principle and a law. The masses have a sound common-sense which never weakens unless evil-disposed men excite their passions. This common-sense rests on the essential need of a common order,—as truly felt at Moscow as in London, in Geneva as in Calcutta. Hence, wherever you assemble families of unequal fortunes within a given space you will see them breaking up into circles of first and second and third classes. Equality may be a *right*, but no human power can convert it into a *fact*.

It would be well for the happiness of France if this truth could be popularized. The least intelligent classes feel the benefit of a public policy which harmonizes and coalesces the needs of all. This harmony is the poetic side of order; and the French nation feels a lively need of order. The co-operation of all interests, — *unity* in short, to give our meaning in one word, — is it not the simplest expression of the principle of order? Architecture, music, poetry, all rest, in France especially, upon this principle, which moreover is written in the depths of our pure, clear language, — and language is, and ever will be, the infallible formula of a nation. This is why our people select poetic music well modulated, seize simple ideas, and choose incisive themes which are packed with thought. France is the only land where a little phrase is able to make a great revolution. The French masses have never revolted from any other reason than the desire to put in unison men, principles, and things. Thus no nation has ever so well understood the idea of unity, possibly because no other has so fully thought out political necessities: as to this, history has never found it in the background. France is often deceived, but as a woman is deceived, — by generous ideas, by ardent sentiments, whose bearings at first escape calculation.

The first characteristic trait of the Faubourg Saint-Germain is the splendor of its mansions, their large gardens and their stillness, in keeping with its ancient territorial magnificence. Is not this space intervening between a class and the whole city-full a material expression of the moral distance which separates them? In all created things the head has its typical place. If,

perchance, a nation fells its chief at its feet, it discovers sooner or later that it has cut its own throat. A nation will not admit that it can die; therefore, at once it sets to work to reconstruct for itself a head. When a nation has no longer the strength to do this it perishes, — as Rome, Venice, and others have perished. The distinction placed by different habits and manners between the two spheres of social activity and social superiority implies, necessarily, an actual and commanding worth at the aristocratic summits. Whenever, in any State and under any form of government, the patricians fall below the conditions of true superiority they lose their strength, and the people cast them out. The people will insist on seeing in their hands, in their hearts, in their heads, fortune, power, and the initiative, — speech, intelligence, and glory. Without this triple strength their privileges vanish. The people, like women, love power in the hands of those who govern them; their love is not given where they do not respect; they will not yield obedience to those who do not command their homage. A despised aristocracy is like a *roi fainéant*, a husband in petticoats; it is a nothing before it is nought.

Thus the sundering of the great from the body of the people, their separate habits, in a word the customs and usages of the patrician caste, is both the symbol of its real power and the cause of its destruction when that power is lost. The Faubourg Saint-Germain has allowed itself to be temporarily cast aside because it has chosen not to recognize the conditions of its existence, which existence could easily have been perpetuated. It ought to have had the good faith to see, as the

English aristocracy saw, that institutions reach climacteric years, when terms no longer have their past meaning, when ideas clothe themselves in new garments, when the conditions of political life change without any essential change in their being. These thoughts have developments which belong to our tale, both in definition of its causes and in explanation of its facts.

The grandeur of châteaus and aristocratic homes, the luxury of their details, the sumptuousness of their appointments; the *orbit* in which the fortunate master, born to wealth, moves without let or hindrance; the habit of never descending to the petty daily calculations of life; the leisure at his disposal, the superior education and training which he acquires from childhood; in short, all those traditions of high breeding that give him a social power which his fellows of another class can barely counterbalance by study, by force of will, by tenacious clinging to some vocation, — all these things should lift the soul of the man who from his youth possesses these privileges, and fill him with that high respect for himself of which nobility of the heart in keeping with the nobility of his name is the natural consequence. This can be truly said of certain families. Here and there in the Faubourg Saint-Germain may be found noble characters, exceptions which weigh against the widespread egoism which has been the ruin of that exclusive world.

All these advantages come to the French aristocracy as they do to the patrician order of all nations, because their existence rests on *domain*, — domain of the soil, which is the only solid base of a society. Nevertheless, those advantages remain with such patricians only

so long as they fulfil the conditions upon which the people leave them in their possession. They hold them as moral fiefs, the tenure of which has its obligations to the sovereign, — and in our day the sovereign is the people. Times have changed; so have weapons. The knight who once was armed with coat of mail and halberd, and went to war with lance and banner, must now give proof of the qualities of his mind. In those days, a brave heart; in our day, a strong brain. Art, science, and gold are the social triangle on which the arms of power are now blazoned, and from which modern aristocracy proceeds. A noble work is the equal of a noble name. The Rothschilds, those modern Fuggers, are princes *de facto*. A great artist is an oligarchy; he represents his century, and becomes almost always a law. Thus with the gift of language: the engines at high pressure of an author, the genius of a poet, the perseverance of a man of business, the will of a statesman which combines in one man many dazzling qualities, the sword of a general, the triumph of individuals in the many ways of life which give them power over society, — in all these things the patrician class should seek the same monopoly which they once held in the matter of material strength.

To remain at the head of a nation it is necessary to know how to lead it; to be the soul and the mind to guide the fingers. How can we lead if we have not the qualities of command? What is the marshal's baton worth if it is not wielded by the trained hand of a captain? The Faubourg Saint-Germain has played with such batons and thought them the equivalent of strength. It has ignored the charter of its existence. Instead of

throwing aside symbols which offended the feelings of the people and holding fast to the essentials of its power, it has let the middle classes seize the power while it clung with fatal persistency to its flag, and neglected the laws imposed upon it by its numerical weakness. An aristocracy which is scarcely a thousandth part of society must to-day, as heretofore, multiply its means of action to carry in the great crises of history a weight equal to that of the masses. In our day means of action lie in actual moral strength, not in historical tradition. Unhappily in France the nobility, still swelling with a sense of its ancient and vanished power, excites prejudice against which it defends itself with difficulty. Perhaps this is a national defect. A Frenchman, above all other men, never steps down from his position; he steps from his own place to the place above him, — with little pity for those he steps over, but much envy of others still above him. He may have a great deal of heart, but he prefers to listen to his head. This national instinct which sends Frenchmen always to the advance, this vanity which eats into their fortune and rules them as rigidly as the principle of economy rules a Dutchman, has for three centuries absolutely dominated our nobility, — which in this respect has been eminently French.

Since the establishment of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, — a revolution of aristocracy which began on the day when the monarchy left Versailles, — it has, allowing for a few lapses, allied itself with power, which will always in France be more or less Faubourg Saint-Germain. Hence its defeat in 1830. In that crisis it was like an army operating without a base. It had not

profited by the peace to plant itself in the heart of the nation: it failed to do so from a defect of training, through a total inability to survey the whole field of its interests. It slew a positive future in favor of a doubtful present. The reason of this blundering policy may have been, that the material and moral distance which as a class it endeavored to maintain between itself and the rest of the nation resulted, after forty years, in developing the personal sentiment of distinction at the expense of the patriotism of caste. Formerly, when the French nobility were rich and powerful they knew in moments of danger where to choose their leaders and how to obey them. As soon as they became less eminent they became more undisciplined. Each man sought, as in the Eastern Empire, to be an emperor: perceiving their equality in weakness, each fancied himself individually superior

Every family ruined by the Revolution and by the equal division of property thought only of itself instead of considering the great family of its caste, and fancied that if each were enriched the whole body would be strong. An error. Wealth is but a sign of power. These families, made up of persons who maintained the traditions of courtesy, of true elegance, of pure language, of the pride and reserve of nobles in the daily current of their lives, — occupations which become petty when made the chief objects of existence, to which they should be only accessory, — had a certain intrinsic worth, which judged by its surface appeared to have only a nominal value. Not one of these families had the courage to ask itself honestly, Are we capable of holding power? They flung themselves into it,

as the lawyers did later in 1830. Instead of becoming a protector, — the natural duty of the great, — the Faubourg Saint-Germain showed itself grasping as a *parvenu.* The day which proved to the most observing nation upon earth that the restored nobility had organized power and the budget for its own selfish profit, the faubourg received a mortal wound. It was pretending to be an aristocracy, when in fact it could no longer be anything but an oligarchy, — two widely different systems, as any man clever enough to read intelligently the ancestral names of these lords of the Upper House will understand.

Undoubtedly, the royal government was well-intentioned; but it constantly forgot that the people must be trained to its own desires, even to its desires of happiness, and that France, capricious as a woman, must be made happy or unhappy in her own way. Had there been many Ducs de Laval, the throne of the eldest branch would have been as firm as that of the House of Hanover. In 1814, and above all in 1820, the French nobility ruled the best-informed epoch, the most aristocratic middle-class, and the most feminine nation in the world. The Faubourg Saint-Germain could easily have led and amused that middle-class, then intoxicated with its rise, and enamoured of the arts and sciences. But the petty lords of this great epoch in national intelligence hated and misunderstood arts and sciences. They did not even know how to present religion, of which they stood greatly in need, under the poetic aspects which would have won it love. While Lamartine, Lamennais, Montalembert, and other writers with talents essentially poetic, revivified and

uplifted religious ideas, those who bungled the government made religion harsh and unacceptable. No nation was ever so amenable; she was like a woman weary of resisting, who lets herself be won: and no government ever made such blundering mistakes. France and womanhood would seem to love faults! To reinstate itself, to found a great oligarchical government, the *noblesse* of the faubourg should have searched its borders in good faith to find the counter-genius of Napoleon; it should have demanded of its own loins a constitutional Richelieu. If such genius was not within it, it should have sought it in lonely garrets, — where perhaps it was then dying of inanition, — and transfused that blood into its veins, just as the English House of Lords gains vigor through its new creations. But the great system of English Toryism is too vast for little heads; and such an importation of customs would have taken more time than the French, ever willing to pay for one success by one *fiasco*, would have given to it. Moreover, far from having that recuperative policy which seeks strength wherever God himself has put it, these little-great nobles hated every strength outside of their own.

Thus it was that the Faubourg Saint-Germain, instead of renewing a patrician youth, grew aged. Etiquette, an institution of secondary importance, could have been maintained if kept for great occasions; but etiquette became a daily warfare, and instead of keeping to its place as a matter of art or magnificence it became a question of the maintenance of power. If at this time the throne was in want of a counsellor equal to the importance of the events of the period, the aristocracy

was even more in want of that due knowledge of public interests which might have supplied the other deficiency. It balked at the marriage of Monsieur de Talleyrand, the only man of the time who had the metal and the head to recast political systems and gloriously revive France. The faubourg mocked at statesmen who were not nobles, and yet it furnished no nobles able to be statesmen.

The nobility might have rendered enormous service to the country by improving their soil, constructing roads and canals, raising the character of the country judges, making themselves, in short, an active territorial power; but instead of this they sold their lands to gamble at the Bourse. They might have won from the middle classes men of talent and action by opening their ranks to admit them. But they chose, on the contrary, to attack them, — and attack them unarmed, for they now held only as a tradition the force which they once possessed. To their own injury they retained only so much of their past fortunes as still supported a haughty pride.

Content with their ancient glory, not one of these families put their sons into the numerous careers which the nineteenth century held out to them. Their youth, thus excluded from the business of life, danced at the balls of Madame instead of pursuing in Paris, under the inspiration of the fresh conscientious young talent of the Empire and the Republic, the work which these great families might so easily have begun in all departments, had they conformed to the spirit of the age, and remodelled their caste according to the demands of the century.

Gathered in its Faubourg Saint-Germain, where the spirit of old feudal oppositions still lingered and mingled with that of the old Court, the aristocracy, coldly united with the Tuileries, existing only on one ground, and above all constituted as it was in the Chamber of Peers, was easy to overthrow. As part of the bone and sinew of the country it would have been indestructible; but cornered in the faubourg, appended to the Court, spread on the budget, one blow of an axe was all that was needed to cut the frail thread of its life. The commonplace figure of a little lawyer came forward to deal the blow. Notwithstanding the fine speech of Monsieur Royer-Collard, the hereditary rights of the peerage and its entailed estates fell before the pasquinades of a man who boasted that he had saved many heads from the executioner, but who now guillotined, awkwardly enough, a great institution.

In all this we may find warnings and instruction. If the French oligarchy is to have no future life, there would be sad cruelty in thus gibbeting it after death: we ought rather to think of burying it with honors. But if the surgeon's knife is sharp to feel, it often gives life to the dying. The Faubourg Saint-Germain may one day find itself more powerful under persecution than it ever was in the days of its glory, — if it finds for itself a head and a system.

It is easy to draw conclusions from this rapid semi-political sketch. The lack of broad views and the assemblage of small errors; the desire of making large fortunes; the want of a creed on which to support political action; a thirst for mere pleasure, which lowered the religious tone and necessitated hypocrisy; the

partial opposition of certain nobler spirits, who judged clearly and were displeased by the jealousies of the Court; the nobility of the provinces, often purer of race than the court nobles, and who, if slighted, became disaffected, — all these causes combined to give the Faubourg Saint-Germain discordant elements within itself. It was neither compact in system nor consistent in its acts; neither truly moral nor honestly licentious; neither corrupt nor corrupting. It did not wholly give up the questions that worked to its injury, neither would it adopt ideas which might have saved it. Besides, however weak its personality may have been, the party as a whole was undoubtedly armed with certain principles which are the life of nations. Therefore it is proper to ask how it came to perish in its vigor.

It was exacting in its selection of those whom it received; it had good taste and much elegant superciliousness, — and yet its fall had nothing brilliant or chivalric about it. Round the emigration of '89 clustered strong sentiments; round the domestic emigration of 1830 were self-interests. Yet the achievements of a few men in literature; the triumphs of oratory, of statesmanship; Monsieur de Talleyrand in the congresses; the conquest of Algiers, and the glory of names become historic on the battlefield, — all these pointed a way for the aristocracy of France to nationalize itself, and win back the recognition of its rights, if only it would deign to take it.

In all organized being there is harmony of parts. If a man is lazy, laziness shows itself in the movements of his body. In like manner the physiognomy of a class conforms to the spirit of it, to the soul which

animates the body. Under the Restoration the woman of the Faubourg Saint-Germain displayed neither the proud hardihood which the court ladies of former days put into their transgressions, nor the humble dignity of the tardy virtues with which they expiated them and which shed about their heads a vivid lustre. She was neither very frivolous nor very grave; her passions, with a few exceptions, were hypocritical, — she made terms, as it were, with their enjoyment. A few of these families lived the *bourgeois* life of the Duchess of Orleans, whose conjugal bed was so absurdly shown to visitors of the Palais Royal; two or three kept up the habits of the Regency, and inspired a sort of disgust in women more adroit than they.

This novel species of great lady had no influence whatever on the morals of the time. She might have had much; she could for instance, in the interests of her caste, have assumed the imposing attitude of the women of the English aristocracy. But she hesitated foolishly among her old traditions, was pious on compulsion and hypocritical in all things, concealing even her good qualities. None of these Frenchwomen could create a *salon* where the great world might learn and practise lessons of good taste and elegance. Their voices, once so potent in literature, — that living expression of all societies, — were now absolutely without sound.

When a literature has no system it has no body, and disappears with its day. Wherever, in any age, there is found in the midst of a nation a body of people drawn apart from others, history nearly always finds among them some principal personage who illustrates

the virtues and the defects of the society to which he belongs,—such as Coligny among the Huguenots, the Coadjutor in the bosom of the Fronde, Richelieu under Louis XV., Danton in the Terror. This identity between a man and his historical surroundings belongs to the nature of things. To lead parties, must we not be in harmony with their ideas? To shine in an epoch, must we not fully reflect it? From this constant obligation upon the prudent and sagacious leaders of a State to consider the follies and prejudices of the masses, come the acts for which some historians blame statesmen, when, far removed themselves from terrible popular convulsions, they judge in cold blood the passions which are necessary to control great secular struggles.

That which is true of the historical comedy of the ages is also true in the narrower sphere of those scenes of a national drama which are called its morals.

V.

At the beginning of the ephemeral life of the Faubourg Saint-Germain under the Restoration, to which, if the foregoing remarks are true, it proved unable to give stability, a young woman was for a time a complete type of the nature, at once superior and feeble, grand and yet puerile, of her caste. She was a woman artificially educated, but really ignorant; full of noble sentiments, yet lacking thought to bring them into order; spending the rich treasures of her soul on conventionalities, though not unwilling to brave society; hesitating, nevertheless, and dropping into artifice as the natural consequence of her scruples; with more waywardness than character, more tastes than enthusiasm, more head than heart; eminently a woman and essentially a coquette; Parisian to the core; loving the brilliancy of the world and its amusements; reflecting not at all, or reflecting too late; of a natural imprudence, which rose at times almost to poetic heights; deliciously insolent, yet humble in the depths of her heart; asserting strength like a reed erect, but, like the reed, ready to bend beneath a firm hand; talking much of religion, not loving it, and yet prepared to accept it as a possible finality. How shall I portray a creature so many-sided? Capable of heroism, yet forgetting to be heroic for the sake of uttering some witty malice; young and sweet; not old in heart, but

aged by the maxims of the world about her, — understanding its selfish philosophy, but never applying it; with the vices of a courtier and the nobility of fresh womanhood; distrusting all things, yet yielding herself up at moments to the fulness of faith.

Must not the portrait of this woman, whose ever-changing tints confused each other, yet with poetic confusion, for a divine light blended them, remain forever unachieved? Her grace was the harmony of her being. Nothing in her was feigned. These passions, these half-passions, this caprice of grandeur, this reality of pettiness, these cold feelings and warm impulses, were natural to her, and came as much from her personal position as from that of the aristocracy to which she belonged. She knew she was solitary in life, and she held herself proudly above the world, in the shelter of her great name. Medea's *I* was in her soul, as it was in that of her caste, which was dying because unwilling to rouse itself or seek a physician of the body-politic, to hold or to be held to anything, so profoundly did it feel itself dead and turning into dust.

The Duchesse de Langeais, such was her name, had been married about four years at the time of the Restoration; that is to say, in 1816, when Louis XVIII., enlightened by the revolution of the Hundred Days, comprehended his situation and his century in spite of advisers, who nevertheless got the better of this Louis XI. without an axe, so soon as he was struck down by disease. The Duchesse de Langeais was a Navarreins, — a ducal family, which from the time of Louis XIV. had followed the practice of never abdicating its own name and titles in its marriages. The daughters

of the house as well as their mother had the right to a *tabouret* at Court. At the age of eighteen, Antoinette de Navarreins came from the deep seclusion in which she had been brought up, to marry the eldest son of the Duc de Langeais. These families were then living isolated from the world; but the invasion of France now promised to the royalists the return of the Bourbons as the only possible conclusion of the war.

The dukes of Navarreins and Langeais, faithful to the Bourbons, had nobly resisted the seduction of imperial distinctions, and the circumstances in which they were placed before this marriage obliged them to keep up the ancient policy of their families. Mademoiselle Antoinette de Navarreins, beautiful and poor, was therefore married to the Marquis de Langeais, whose father the duke died a few months after the marriage. On the return of the Bourbons the two families reassumed their rank, their functions, and their court dignities; once more taking part in society, from which they had long withheld themselves. They now stood at the summit of the restored political and social world. In that day of base and false conversions, the public conscience recognized with satisfaction the spotless fidelity of these families and the harmony of their private acts with their political probity, to which all parties rendered involuntary homage. But by a misfortune not uncommon in times of compromise, noble natures, whose elevated views and sound principles might have taught France the generosity of a new and bold policy, were pushed aside from the affairs of the nation, which fell into the hands of those who were interested in carrying principles to an extreme as a pledge of their new-born devotion.

The families De Langeais and De Navarreins were therefore retained in the highest sphere of court life, and condemned to bear the duties of its etiquette as well as the reproaches and ridicule of liberalism, by which they were accused of gorging themselves with honors and wealth, while in point of fact their patrimonies had not increased, and their receipts from the civil list were consumed by the mere costs of appearance, — a necessity for all European monarchies, even those which are republican.

In 1818 the Duc de Langeais commanded a military division in the provinces, and the duchess had a place at Court in the suite of one of the princesses, which enabled her to live in Paris far from her husband without scandal. The duke had, in addition to his command, some court function which sometimes required his presence; on which occasions he left the division in charge of a general of brigade. The duke and the duchess lived absolutely separated from one another, both in fact and in feeling. This marriage of mere convention had resulted as such family compacts usually do. Two characters most uncongenial had suddenly been brought together; they displeased and wounded each other, and separated forever, — each following the bent of their own nature and the habits of their world. The Duc de Langeais, as great a martinet as the Chevalier Folard (famous as a writer on military tactics), gave himself up methodically to his tastes and his pleasures, and left his wife absolutely free to follow hers. He perceived in her nature a proud spirit, a cold heart, a deep submission to the customs of the world, and a youthful honor which was likely to remain unsullied

under the eyes of their grandparents and in the atmosphere of a court at once pious and prudish. He played deliberately and in cold blood the part of a *seigneur* of the preceding century, and abandoned a young woman of twenty-two whom he had deeply offended, and who had in her character the alarming quality of never pardoning an offence if her vanity as a woman, or her pride, or her virtues, had been misunderstood and secretly wounded. When an outrage is made public a woman prefers to forget it; it gives her opportunities for generous action. She is a woman in her forgiveness; but women will not forgive secret wrongs, because they like nothing that is hidden, — neither virtue, nor love, nor concealed cowardice.

SO RIGHT →

Such was the position, unknown to the world, in which the Duchesse de Langeais found herself, and on which she wasted no reflections, when the fêtes in honor of the marriage of the Duc de Berri took place. On this occasion the Court and the Faubourg Saint-Germain came out of their apathy and reserve; and from that event dates the unheard-of splendor which the Government of the Restoration wantonly displayed. At this period the Duchesse de Langeais, from policy or from vanity, never appeared in the world unless surrounded by a bevy of three or four women distinguished by name as well as by position. Queen of society, she had her ladies-in-waiting, who reproduced in other *salons* her manners and her wit. She had cleverly chosen them from among those who were not closely allied either to the Court or the Faubourg, but who aspired to both positions, and who sought to rise into the atmosphere of royalty, and breathe the seraphic air

of that high sphere called in those days "le petit château."

In such a position the Duchesse de Langeais was strong, well-supported, and in perfect security. Her ladies defended her against calumny, and helped her to play the contemptible part of a woman of fashion. She could laugh at men and passions at her ease; excite them, gather in the homage which nourishes female nature, and yet remain mistress of herself. In the great world of Paris, women are always true to the nature of woman; they live by incense, flattery, and praise. Beauty the most perfect, grace the most adorable, what are they worth if not admired? Lovers and the sycophancy of adulation are the vouchers of their power. What is power if unnoticed? Nothing. The prettiest woman in the world alone in the corner of a *salon* is unhappy. When such a woman is at the centre of social magnificence she craves to reign in all hearts,—sometimes, because she cannot be the happy sovereign of one. At this period of our history her *toilettes*, her charms, her coquetries were lavished on beings as paltry as were ever found in any society,—fops without mind, men whose sole merit was a handsome face, for whom women compromised themselves without equivalent; gilded idols of wood, who with a few exceptions had neither the antecedents of the coxcombs in the days of the Fronde, nor the solid weight of the heroes of the Empire, nor the wit and manners of their grandfathers, but who assumed, nevertheless, to possess these advantages gratis. They were brave, as all young Frenchmen are; they had ability no doubt, if put to the proof, but they were helpless during the lifetime of

old men who held them as it were in a leash. It was a cold, petty, and unpoetical epoch; and proves perhaps that a Restoration needs time to become a Monarchy.

For eighteen months the Duchesse de Langeais had led this empty life, filled exclusively with balls and amusements, triumphs without an object, and ephemeral passions born and dead of a night. When she entered a room all eyes turned upon her; she gleaned flatteries passionately expressed, and encouraged them with a gesture or a glance, but they never penetrated beneath her fair exterior. Her tone, her manners, everything about her marked authority. She lived a feverish life of vanity and perpetual amusement which made her giddy; and at times she went far in conversation, listened to everything, and depraved, so to speak, the surface of her mind. When alone, she often blushed over the recollection of things at which she had laughed in public,—scandalous stories, whose details had helped her to discuss theories of love of which she knew nothing, and the subtle distinctions of modern passion which complying hypocrites of her own sex expounded to her; for women, able to say everything to each other, lose among themselves more purity than men take from them.

There came a time when she saw that the woman beloved was the only being whose beauty and whose mind were really recognized. What was a husband? He merely proved that a young girl was well brought up or well portioned, had a clever mother, or that she satisfied a man's ambition. But a lover was a perpetual programme of her personal perfections. Madame de Langeais learned, young as she was, that a woman

could allow herself to love ostensibly, without sharing in love, without sanctioning it, without gratifying it except by the most meagre pittance of return; and more than one hypocritical prude taught her the method of playing these dangerous comedies.

The duchess therefore had her court where the number of those who adored her and courted her was the guarantee of her virtue. One evening she was at the house of an intimate friend, the Viscomtesse de Fontanges, — a humble rival who hated her sincerely and accompanied her everywhere, and with whom she maintained a species of armed friendship in which both were distrustful and their confidences discreet, not to say deceitful. After distributing a few patronizing recognitions with the air of a woman who knows the value of her smiles, her eyes chanced to fall upon a man wholly unknown to her, whose grave and noble countenance took her completely by surprise. She felt as she looked at him an emotion that resembled fear.

"My dear," she said to the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, who was standing near her; "who is that new-comer?"

"A man whom you must have heard of, — the Marquis de Montriveau."

"Ah, is it he?" She raised her eyeglass and examined him coolly, as she might have looked at a portrait which receives all glances and can return none. "Present him to me," she said; "he must be amusing."

"The most tiresome and gloomy man in the world, my dear; but he is all the fashion."

VI.

MONSIEUR ARMAND DE MONTRIVEAU was at this time, though unaware of it, an object of great fashionable curiosity; and he deserved it far more than the passing idols with which Paris is enamored for a few days, merely to satisfy the passion of infatuation and false enthusiasm with which it is periodically afflicted.

Armand de Montriveau was the only son of General de Montriveau, one of the *ci devant* nobles before the Revolution, who nobly served the Republic and perished, — killed by the side of Joubert, at Novi. The orphan was placed by order of Bonaparte in the military school at Châlons, and taken, with sons of other generals killed in battle, under the protection of the French republic. On leaving Châlons without fortune, he entered the artillery, and was in command of only a battalion when the disaster at Fontainebleau occurred. The arm to which he belonged offered few chances of promotion. In the first place the number of its officers is more limited than in any other branch of the service; next, the liberal, almost republican, opinions which the artillery professed, and the fears thus inspired in the Emperor's mind by a body of instructed men accustomed to reflection, went far to hinder the military fortunes of the best of them. Contrary, therefore, to the usual rule, officers advanced to the generalship of this arm were not always the most distinguished members

of it, for the reason that in the eyes of the Emperor mediocrity was a safeguard. The artillery was a corps apart to some extent from the army itself, and belonged to Napoleon only on the field of battle.

To these general causes, which partly explain the checks which Armand de Montriveau had encountered in his military career, were joined others inherent in his person and character. Alone in the world; thrown at the age of twenty into the midst of that tempestuous crowd of men who surrounded Napoleon; having no interests outside of himself; prepared to meet death day by day, — he came to live within his own mind by an honorable self-esteem and the consciousness of duty fulfilled. He was habitually silent, like other timid men; timid, not from lack of courage, but from a sort of shyness and modesty which kept him from all demonstration of himself. His intrepidity on the battle-field was never mere bluster: his eye was everywhere; he could tranquilly give orders and advice to his comrades, or advance himself into the midst of bullets, — bending, however, at the right moment to avoid them. His nature was kind, but his countenance made him seem haughty and severe. With principles that were mathematically stern, he admitted no hypocritical compromises with the duties of his position, nor with the consequences of his acts. He lent himself to nothing of which he could feel ashamed, and asked nothing for himself. He was, in truth, one of the world's great men unrecognized, — men who are philosophical enough to despise mere glory, and who live without attachment to life for the reason that they do not find a way to develop their powers of mind and heart to their full extent. He was feared,

held in high esteem, and little loved. Men will permit us to rise above them, but they will not forgive him who refuses to descend as low as they. Thus the feelings they bestow on noble characters are never without the elements of hatred and fear. To be worthy of high honor is for them a tacit censure, which they forgive neither to the living nor to the dead.

After the parting at Fontainebleau, Montriveau, though noble and titled, was placed on half-pay. His old-fashioned integrity alarmed the war department, where his faithfulness to his oath taken to the imperial eagle was well understood. During the Hundred Days he was appointed colonel of the Guard, and was wounded at Waterloo. His wounds having detained him in Belgium, he was not with the army of the Loire. Nevertheless, the royal government would not recognize a rank bestowed during those Days, and Armand de Montriveau, thus put aside, quitted France. Led by a spirit of enterprise and a nobility of mind which up to this time the chances of war had satisfied, prompted also by the instinctive desire of high natures for enterprises of national utility, the Marquis de Montriveau embarked on a journey to explore Upper Egypt and the unknown parts of Africa, more especially the central countries which in our day excite the interest of men of science. The expedition was long and disastrous. He gathered precious notes, which would have given long-sought solutions to many geographical and industrial problems. He had reached, not without surmounting obstacles, the very heart of Africa, when he fell by treachery into the power of a savage tribe. He was stripped of everything, held in slavery, and

dragged for two years across deserts, threatened with death at every moment, and worse treated than an animal in the hands of pitiless children. His bodily strength and the steadfast courage of his nature enabled him to bear the horrors of his captivity; and he bent the full force of his energy to a plan of escape, which succeeded miraculously. He reached the French settlement on the Senegal half dead, in rags, and with nothing left of his enterprise but the recollections preserved in his own mind. The immense toils of the journey, his studies of African dialects, his discoveries and scientific observations were all lost. A single fact will serve to illustrate his sufferings. For several days the children of the sheik of the tribe which held him in bondage amused themselves by a game of throwing the bones of horses at his head and making them stick there.

Montriveau returned to Paris in the summer of 1818 ruined in prospects, without patrons and seeking none. He would have died twenty times rather than solicit a favor, no matter what it might be, not even the recognition of his own rights. Adversity and suffering had developed his native energy even in small things; and the habit of maintaining his dignity as a man in presence of that moral being which we call conscience, gave importance in his mind to acts apparently insignificant. Nevertheless, his reports to the scientific men of Paris and to a few military men of attainments made known to a certain extent his merits and his adventures.

The particulars of his travels, more especially those of his captivity and escape, revealed such wisdom and

courage that he acquired without being aware of it the fleeting celebrity of which the *salons* of Paris are prodigal, and which is only perpetuated at the price of unheard-of efforts. Towards the end of the year his position suddenly changed. From poor he became rich, or at least he had the external advantages of wealth. The royal government, which now felt the need of attracting men who would give real strength to the army, began to make concessions to those old officers whose known character and loyalty offered guarantees of fidelity. Monsieur de Montriveau was replaced on his rank in the Royal Guard, and favors were successively shown to him without solicitation of his own; for friends spared him all personal efforts, which he assuredly would never have made for himself.

Contrary to his habits, which in this respect suddenly changed, he went into society, where he was favorably received, and where he met on all sides evidences of esteem. He seemed to have reached some crisis in his life; but in him all took place within his own breast, and he confided nothing to the world without. He bore in society a grave and reserved manner, and was coldly silent. Yet in spite of this he had much social success; precisely because his presence cut sharply across the monotony of the conventional faces which at that epoch furnished the *salons* of Paris, where, indeed, his own was singularly unique. His speech had the conciseness that belongs to the language of solitary men and savages. His shyness was taken for pride, and pleased accordingly. He was both strange and grand, and women were all the more taken with him because he escaped from their adroit flatteries and the manœuvres

by which they circumvent men,—even men with force of character,—and worm their way into the feelings of the most inflexible. Monsieur de Montriveau did not in the least understand their little Parisian tricks; his nature could respond only to the sonorous vibrations of real feeling, and society might soon have left him to himself if friends had not sung his praises, and if the woman who was destined to occupy his thoughts had not desired the triumph of her self-love.

Thus the curiosity of the Duchesse de Langeais was as lively as it was natural. By a mere chance this man had interested her the night before, for some one had related to her a scene in Monsieur de Montriveau's journey which was fit to impress the lively imagination of a woman. In an expedition towards the sources of the Nile, Monsieur de Montriveau had a struggle with one of his guides as remarkable as any that can be found in the annals of travel. There was a desert which he was compelled to cross on foot in order to reach a point that he was anxious to explore. Only one man was able to guide him. Up to that time no traveller had penetrated to this region, where the intrepid officer believed he should find the solution of several scientific problems. In spite of remonstrances from the old men of the country and from the man who offered to guide him, he persisted in undertaking the terrible journey.

Armed with all his courage,—roused, we may add, by the assurance of great difficulties to overcome,—he started early one morning. After marching through the desert for a whole day he slept at night upon the sand, enduring unexpected fatigue from the shifting of his bed, which seemed to slip away from him at every

turn. He knew that on the morrow he must start at daybreak, and the guide had assured him that by the middle of the day he should reach his goal. This assurance gave him courage and invigorated his strength, and in spite of his sufferings he continued his way, cursing science in his heart, but ashamed to complain openly before his guide. He had marched for more than a third of the day when his strength gave out, and his feet became blistered and bleeding. Turning to the guide, he asked if they should soon arrive.

"In one hour," said the Arab.

Armand roused his strength for one hour more, and went on. The hour went by, and still nothing was seen on the horizon of sand, vast as the ocean, of the palm-trees and the wooded hills, the sight of whose tops would have foretold the end of his journey. He stopped and refused to go farther: he threatened the guide, called him a murderer, and accused him of wilful deception. Tears of rage and horrible fatigue ran down his scorched cheeks; he was bent double with the sufferings of the march, and his throat seemed closing with the thirst of the desert. The guide, unmoved, listened to his reproaches with an ironical air, seeming to study with the indifference of an Oriental the texture of the sand, now almost black in its reflections like burnished gold.

"I was deceived," he said coldly. "It is long since I came this way, and I can hardly find the track. We are on it, but we still have two hours march before us."

"The man is doubtless right," thought Montriveau, and he went on with difficulty, following the pitiless Arab, to whom he seemed bound by cords as a condemned man is bound to his executioner.

The two hours passed; the Frenchman had spent his last energy, and still the horizon lay straight, its line unbroken by palms or mountains. He had no strength left for cries or murmurs, and he lay down on the sand to die; but his glance might have terrified even an intrepid man: it seemed to tell his guide that he would not die alone. The Arab looked at him like a demon, with a calm eye full of power, and left him where he lay, moving to a short distance out of range of his victim's despair. Presently Montriveau recovered strength to utter a last curse. The man came to him, looked at him fixedly, motioned him to silence, and said: —

"Did you not insist against our advice on going to the place to which I am now guiding you? You reproach me with deceiving you. If I had not deceived you, you could not have come as far as this. You ask the truth: here it is. We have five hours' march before us: we cannot now turn back upon our steps. Sound your heart; if your courage fails, here is my poniard."[1]

Struck by this union of human will and endurance, Monsieur de Montriveau would not fall below the standard of a barbarian: drawing from his European pride a fresh draught of courage, he went on. The five hours passed by; and still nothing was seen. Montriveau turned a dying eye upon his guide; but at the same moment the Arab lifted him on his shoulders and showed him almost at their feet a lake embosomed in verdure, and a forest lit up by the rays of the setting sun. They were within a short distance of a granite ledge, beneath which an earthly paradise lay, as it were, buried. Armand felt born again; and his guide, that

giant of intelligence and courage, ended his labor of devotion by carrying the intrepid explorer across the burning and polished granite; from which he could see on the one hand the hell of the torturing sand, and on the other the loveliest oasis of the desert.

Madame de Langeais, already struck with the aspect of this poetic personage, was still more interested when she learned that he was the Marquis de Montriveau, of whom she had dreamed the night before. To have followed him across the burning desert, to have had him as the companion of her dreams,— what could offer to such a woman a greater prospect of amusement?

No man ever more distinctly expressed his character in his person than Armand de Montriveau, or challenged more inevitably the thoughts of others. His head, which was large and square, had the characteristic trait of an abundant mass of black hair, which surrounded his face in a way that recalled General Kléber, whom indeed he otherwise resembled by the vigor of his bearing, the shape of his face, the tranquil courage of his eye, and the expression of inward ardor which shone out through his strong features. He was of medium height, broad in the chest, and muscular as a lion. When he walked, his carriage, his step, his least gesture bespoke a consciousness of power which was imposing; there was something even despotic about it. He seemed aware that nothing could oppose his will; possibly because he willed only that which was right. Nevertheless he was — like all men really strong — gentle in speech, simple in manner, and naturally kind. Occasionally these finer qualities disappeared under certain

circumstances, and then the man within became implacable in his feelings, fixed in his resolves, terrible in his actions; and an observer would have seen at the closing line of his lips a curve which betrayed his disposition to irony.

VII.

The Duchesse de Langeais, knowing the passing value of such a conquest, resolved, during the few moments that Madame de Maufrigneuse took to bring him up for presentation, to make this man one of her lovers and give him precedence over all the rest; to attach him to her suite, and charm him with all her coquetries. It was a caprice, — the pure whim of a duchess, such as Calderon or Lope de la Vega might have pictured. She resolved that this man should belong to no other woman, but she never for a moment dreamed of belonging to him.

Madame de Langeais had by nature the gift of charm, and her education had perfected it. Women envied her, and men loved her. Nothing was lacking in her to inspire love; neither that which justified it, nor that which perpetuated it. Her style of beauty and her manners, her ways of speaking and her attitudes, all combined to give her the grace of natural attraction, which seemed in her to be the conscience of her power. Her figure was well made, and had an easy movement and change of attitude, — which was, indeed, her only affectation. Everything about her was in harmony, from the least little gesture to the special turn of her phrases and the charming hypocrisy with which she bestowed her smiles. The predominant character of her countenance was a gracious and elegant nobleness.

which was not lessened by the mobility, altogether French, of her movements. These ever-changing attitudes had an infinite charm for men. Indeed, the germs of all the joys of love were in the freedom of her expressive glance, in the caressing tones of her voice, and the quiet grace of her language. Whoever passed an evening beside her found her flitting from grave to gay, yet with no pretended gayety or gravity. She could be, at will, courteous, contemptuous, sarcastic, or confiding. She seemed kind, and really was so; for in her position she was seldom tempted to be unamiable. There were days when she showed herself by turns trustful and distrustful, tender to emotion, then hard and chilling to the heart. But to paint her, must I not gather together every feminine antithesis? In a word, she was everything she wished to be or to seem. Her face, which was perhaps a trifle too long, had an infinite grace; something spiritual and slender about it recalled the faces of the Middle Ages, and the skin was pale with delicate rose-tints: indeed, if she had a fault, it came through excess of delicacy.

Monsieur de Montriveau allowed himself very willingly to be presented to the Duchesse de Langeais, and she, with the exquisite tact that avoids commonplace, received him without questions or compliments, but with a certain respectful grace meant to flatter a superior man; for superiority in a man implies the tact that can penetrate the real sentiments of a woman. If she showed curiosity, it was only by her glance; if she flattered, it was only by her manner; and she played the pretty tricks of speech with a delicate desire to please which no one knew better how to show. But

the whole conversation was, in reality, only the body of the letter; there was to be a postscript, where the real thought was uttered. When therefore at the end of half an hour's chat, in which tones and smiles alone had any value, Monsieur de Montriveau prepared discreetly to withdraw, the duchess retained him by a gesture.

"Monsieur," she said, "I hardly know if the few moments in which I have had the pleasure of conversing with you have offered you sufficient attraction to justify me in asking you to come and see me at home. I am afraid there is much egotism in my desire to draw you there; but if I have been so happy as to make the prospect agreeable to you, you will always find me in the evening until ten o'clock."

These words were said in so caressing a tone that Monsieur de Montriveau could do no less than accept the invitation. When he fell back into the group of men who stood at some distance from the women, several of his friends congratulated him — half in jest, half in earnest — on the unusual welcome the duchess had accorded him. The difficult and illustrious conquest they declared was undoubtedly made, and the glory thereof had fallen to the artillery of the Guard. It is easy to guess the good and evil jests which the topic, once launched, suggested to that idle world of Paris which loves to amuse itself, and whose amusements are so ephemeral that each individual hastens to pluck the flower while it blooms.

This nonsense flattered the general unconsciously. From the place where he stationed himself his eyes were drawn to the duchess by many confused impulses.

He could not help admitting to himself that of all the women whose beauty had caught his eye none had ever shone for him with such delightful mingling of virtues and defects, — a harmony which the youth of France most desires in a mistress. Is there a man, no matter in what rank his fate has placed him, who has not felt the indefinable joy of finding in the woman he chooses for his own, — though his choice be but a dream, — the triple moral, physical, and social perfection which allows him to see in her the accomplishment of his every wish? If it is not the cause of love, this delightful union of qualities is assuredly the finest medium of all feeling. "Without vanity," said a great moralist of the last century, "love is convalescence." There is undoubtedly for a man, even more than for a woman, a treasure-house of delight in the superiority of the being beloved. Is it not much, perhaps all, to feel that our self-love can never be wounded through her deficiencies; that she is too noble to be cut by the keen glances of a contemptuous eye, sufficiently wealthy to be lapped in splendors equal to those of the ephemeral sovereigns of finance, and beautiful enough to be the rival of all her sex?

Such reflections as these a man makes in the twinkling of an eye; but if the woman who inspires them offers him at the same time, for the future of his sudden passion, the changing charms of grace, the ingenuousness of a virgin soul, the thousand folds and lines of coquettish allurement, and all the perils of love, will not the coldest heart of man be stirred? Monsieur de Montriveau's peculiar relation to woman could have been rendered possible only by the circumstances of his past

life. Thrown young into the tempest of the French wars, having always lived on fields of battle, he knew women only as a hurried traveller passing from inn to inn knows of the countries through which he travels. Perhaps he might have said of his life as Voltaire at the age of eighty said of his; and had he not thirty-seven follies with which to reproach himself? He was, at his age, as new to love as the young man who reads Faublas in secret. Of woman he knew all, but of love he knew nothing; and this virginity of spirit gave birth to desires which had the freshness of youth. Some men withheld by labors to which they are condemned either by poverty or ambition, as Montriveau had been restrained by the fortunes of war and the events of his subsequent life, have known the same situation, though they seldom avow it. In Paris every man is supposed to have loved; indeed, no woman desires him for whom no other women have sighed. From the fear of being thought a fool in this respect come the foppish lies so often told in Paris, where to be a fool means to be an alien in that accomplished world.

Monsieur de Montriveau was in the clutches of a passionate desire, deepened by his long loneliness in the desert; and his heart swelled with an emotion of which until now he had never felt the strain. But, firm as he was passionate, he controlled his feelings, although while talking with apparent indifference to his friends he withdrew into his own mind, and swore to himself that he would win that woman. The desire became an oath after the manner of the Arabs, among whom he had lived, and to whom an oath is a contract made between destiny and their souls, which they stake on the success of the enterprise consecrated by their oath,— counting death itself as one chance the more of success.

A young man would have said, "I should like to win the Duchesse de Langeais," or, "The man the Duchesse de Langeais loves will be a happy fellow;" but Montriveau said, "I shall win Madame de Langeais." When a man, virgin in heart and for whom love is a religion, admits such a thought, he does not know the hell into which he sets his foot.

The general left the *salon* abruptly, and went home quivering with the pulsings of his first fever of love. If towards middle age a man retains his beliefs and his illusions, and the sincerity and impetuosity of youth, his first movement is to put forth his hand and seize the object of his desire. But when he has measured the distance which separates him from it, a distance nearly impossible to cross, he falls, like the children, into a sort of impatient wonder, which gives new value to the thing desired. Therefore on the morrow, after stormy reflections which ploughed up his mind, Armand de Montriveau knew himself to be under the dominion of a true love. The woman he had cavalierly declared should be his the night before had now become to him a sacred and imposing power: she was destined thenceforth to be to him the whole of life and the world. The mere recollection of the emotion she had caused him thrilled him more than the keenest joys or pains of his past life. Revolutions trouble only the interests of mankind, but one passion can uproot every other feeling in the heart of a man. For those who live by feelings rather than by interests, who have more heart and blood than mind and lymph, a true love will change the whole course of existence. With one thought, at one stroke, Armand de Montriveau effaced his past life.

After asking himself twenty times, like a child, "Shall I go?—shall I not go?" he dressed and went to the Hôtel de Langeais about eight in the evening, and was admitted to the presence of the woman—no, not the woman, the idol he had seen the night before under the blaze of lights, fresh and pure as a young girl, dressed in gauzy veils and laces. He entered impetuously, resolved to declare his love as he would have brought up his cannon on the battle-field. Poor neophyte! he found his nebulous sylphide swathed in a wrapper of brown cashmere of much amplitude, languidly lying upon a divan in a dark boudoir. Madame de Langeais did not rise, and only showed her head, with the hair somewhat in disorder and covered by a veil. With a hand which in the faint light of one wax candle placed at a distance seemed to the eyes of Montriveau white as marble, the duchess made him a sign to be seated, and said in a voice as faint as the light,—

"If it were any one but you, Monsieur le marquis,—if it had been a friend with whom I could take a liberty, or some one in whom I feel no interest, I should have sent him away. You find me suffering terribly."

Armand said to himself: "I must go."

"But," she added, with a glance which the ingenuous soldier attributed to fever, "I hardly know if it can be from a presentiment of your visit,—for the promptness of which I must truly thank you,—but for the last few moments my head feels better."

"I may remain?" asked Armand.

"Ah, I should be sorry indeed to have you go. I said to myself this morning that I could scarcely have made any impression upon you; that you had doubt-

less taken my invitation for one of those meaningless phrases for which Parisian women are celebrated. Therefore I pardoned, by anticipation, your absence. A man who comes from the desert is not expected to know how exclusive our faubourg is in its friendships."

These gracious words, half murmured, fell from her lips slowly, as if each were freighted with the pleased feeling that appeared to dictate them. The duchess, bent on making the most of her headache, succeeded admirably. The poor soldier suffered really from the pretended suffering of his divinity. Ah, how could he speak to her now of his love? Armand began to perceive that it would be folly indeed to fling it in the face of such a being as this. He caught up, as it were by one thought, all the niceties of feeling and the exigencies of a delicate soul. To love? — was it not to plead, to crave, to wait? If he felt this love, must he not prove it? Thus he found himself silenced, chilled, by the proprieties of the noble faubourg, by the majestic weakness of this headache, and, more than all, by the timidity of a genuine love. But no power on earth could have quenched the glance of his eyes, which blazed with the fire of his love and of the desert, — eyes which burned stilly like those of a panther, and over which the lids rarely fell. She liked these fixed looks, which bathed her in light and love.

"Madame la duchesse," he answered, "I fear that I shall ill express my gratitude for your goodness. At this moment I have but one thought, — the wish to relieve your sufferings."

"Permit me to get rid of this thing, it is too warm," she said, throwing off by a movement full of grace the

covering that had lain upon her feet, which were now disclosed to view.

"Madame, in Asia your feet would be valued at ten thousand sequins."

"A traveller's flattery!" she said, smiling.

This bright and clever creature now took delight in drawing the grave Montriveau through a conversation full of trifling and commonplace nonsense, where he manœuvred, in military parlance, like Prince Charles when pitted against the genius of Napoleon. She amused herself maliciously by reconnoitring the lines of the new passion, shown by the number of silly remarks which she wrested from her neophyte, as she led him step by step into a labyrinth where she intended to leave him very much ashamed of himself. She began the advance therefore by laughing at him,— all the while trying to make him forget the time. The length of a first visit is often a flattery; but as to this, Armand was not her accomplice. The great traveller had been only an hour in the boudoir, talking of everything and saying nothing, aware that he was an instrument in the hands of this woman who was playing upon him, when she suddenly sat up, slipped the veil from her head to her throat, did him the honor of a complete recovery, and rang for lights. To the absolute inaction in which she had been lying succeeded movements full of grace.

She turned to Monsieur de Montriveau and said, in reply to a confidence she had just maliciously wrung from him and which appeared to interest her much: "You are laughing at me when you try to make me think that you have never loved. That is a favorite

pretence of men. We believe it? Ah, pure civility! Do you think we cannot judge you for ourselves? Where is the man who never in his life has found occasion to be in love? But you all delight in deceiving us; and we let you do it — silly fools that we are! — because your deceptions are an homage paid to the superiority of our sentiments, which are always pure."

The last sentence was uttered in a tone of pride and distant dignity, which converted the hapless novice of love into a ball flung down through an abyss, and the duchess into an angel floating upward to her own particular sphere.

"The devil!" cried Armand de Montriveau, within his soul, "how shall I ever tell this beautiful, far-off being that I love her?"

He had already told her so twenty times, or rather the duchess had twenty times read it in his eyes, and perceived in this genuine passion of a truly great man a keen amusement for herself and an interest in a life hitherto devoid of interests. She therefore made ready to throw up a succession of redoubts, which he should be forced to carry before he was permitted to approach the citadel of her heart. Plaything of her caprices, Montriveau was to be kept stationary, all the while surmounting obstacle after obstacle, — as an insect is tormented by children who make it jump from finger to finger thinking it is getting away, while its mischievous little captors keep it to the same place.

For all this, the duchess felt in her heart with joy that this man of worth and character had spoken the truth. It was true that Monsieur de Montriveau had never loved. He prepared to take his leave

discontented with himself, still more discontented with her; and she saw with delight an ill-humor which she could dissipate with a word, a look, or a gesture.

"Will you come to-morrow evening?" she said. "I am going to a ball, and I shall expect you up to ten o'clock."

VIII.

The next day was spent by Montriveau chiefly in gazing out of the window of his study, and in consuming an indefinite number of cigars. In no other way did he seem able to kill the time until he could dress and go to the Hôtel de Langeais. To those who knew the noble worth of this man, it would have been pitiful to see him thus belittled, thus agitated, and to feel that a mind whose qualities had done work for the world was now contracted to the limits of a lady's boudoir. But he felt his happiness so involved, that to save his life he would not have confided his love even to a friend. Is there not always some sense of shame in the modesty which takes possession of a man when he loves; and does not this shame form a part of the woman's triumph; and is it not among the many reasons never explained to themselves which lead women to be the first, usually, to betray the secrets of their love, — when the secresy, we may add, has become a burden to them?

"Monsieur," said the footman, "Madame la duchesse is not yet visible. She is dressing, and begs you to wait for her."

Armand walked about the room charmed with the taste displayed in all its details. He admired Madame de Langeais in admiring the things which were hers, and which betrayed her habits, even before he saw

their real merits. After making him wait an hour, the duchess came from her bedroom softly, without noise. Montriveau turned, and quivered as he saw her gliding forward like a shadow. She came to him without saying, as a woman of less breeding might have done, "Do you like my dress?" She was sure of that; but her glance said, "I have dressed to please you."

The fairy godmother of some hidden princess could alone have wound about the throat of this charming creature the cloud of gauze whose folds held tints that threw into relief the lustre of her transparent skin. The duchess was dazzling. The delicate blue of her gown, whose garlands were the same as the flowers in her hair, gave substance by its color to the fragile figure which seemed to be aërial in its motion; for Madame de Langeais, gliding rapidly towards Armand, let the ends of her scarf float behind her, so that our gallant soldier compared her in his thoughts to those beautiful blue insects which hover above the waters and among the flowers, with whose azure tints they blend and disappear.

"I have made you wait," she said, in the voice women take towards men whom they wish to please.

"I would have waited an eternity to find so lovely a divinity. But it is no compliment to speak to you of your beauty; you can accept nothing less than adoration. Will you suffer me to kiss your scarf?"

"Ah, no!" she said with a proud gesture, "I esteem you enough to offer you my hand," and she held it out to him still moist and perfumed.

The hand of a woman at the moment when she comes from her bath retains I know not what of dewy

freshness and softened texture, which sends a delicious tingling from the lips to the soul.

"Will you always give it to me thus?" said the general, humbly kissing that dangerous hand.

"Yes; but we will go no farther," she said smiling.

She sat down, and seemed to find difficulty in putting on her gloves, and in slipping the kid along her slender fingers; looking from time to time at Monsieur de Montriveau, who was admiring alternately the duchess and the grace of her reiterated gesture.

"Ah, this is delightful!" she said. "You are so punctual! I love punctuality. His Majesty calls it the politeness of kings, but for my part I accept it as the most respectful of flatteries. Don't you think it is?"

She threw him a glance of specious friendliness when she saw that he was mute with pleasure and positively happy in such mere nothings. Ah, Madame de Langeais knew her business as a woman! She knew well how to raise a man up when his love was lowering to his pride; how to reward him by hollow flattery for every step he took downward into the follies of sentimentality.

"You will never forget to come at nine o'clock?"

"Oh, no! But do you go to a ball every night?"

"How can I tell?" she answered, shrugging her shoulders with a childish gesture that seemed to say she was all caprice, and that a lover must take her as he found her.

"Besides," she added, "it cannot signify to you; you shall take me to the ball."

"To-night," he said, "it would be difficult; for I am not suitably dressed."

"It seems to me," she observed, looking haughtily at him, "that if any one can object to your dress it is I. You should know, Monsieur *le voyageur*, that the man whose arm I accept is above fashion, and that no one will dare to criticise him. I see that you don't know the world; and I like you the better for it."

She was dragging him all the while into the puerilities of the world, and instructing him as to the vanities of a woman of fashion.

"If she chooses to commit a folly for me," said Armand to himself, "I should be a great fool to prevent her. If she does, it certainly must mean that she loves me. I know she can't despise the world more than I do; so I am ready for the ball."

The duchess was thinking that when people saw the general following her in boots and a black cravat, they would not hesitate to proclaim him passionately in love with her. Montriveau, on the other hand, delighted to believe that the queen of elegant society was willing to compromise herself for him, found his wit rising with his hopes. Conscious that he pleased, he began to express real ideas and feelings, and lost the constraint that held him down the night before. This genuine conversation, solid, animated, and filled with confidences as agreeable to hear as to utter, did it really charm Madame de Langeais, or had she planned it with delightful coquetry? Certain it is that she glanced mischievously at the clock when it struck midnight.

"Ah! you have made me lose the ball," she exclaimed with an air of surprise and vexation. Then she smiled softly to herself, as if admitting the exchange

of pleasures, in a way that caused the soldier's heart to bound.

"I had promised Madame de Beauséant," she said; "they are all expecting me."

"Well, then, go."

"No," she said, "I shall stay at home. Your adventures in the East are delightful. Tell me the whole of your life there. I love to share the sufferings of a brave man,—for I do feel them, truly." She played with her scarf, twisting it and tearing it by hasty, impatient movements, which seemed to express some inward dissatisfaction and serious thought.

"Women are worth nothing!" she exclaimed. "Ah, we are unworthy beings, selfish, frivolous! All we know is how to be bored by amusements. In the olden time women were beneficent lights: they lived to comfort those who wept, to encourage great virtues, to reward artists and inspire their work with noble thoughts. If the world has grown small, the fault is ours. You make me hate the life of balls and amusements. Ah, I have sacrificed very little to you to-night!" She ended by destroying the scarf, as a child playing with a flower tears off petal after petal; then rolling it up, disclosing her white and flexible throat, she threw it from her and rang the bell.

"I shall not go out," she said to the footman. Then she turned her long blue eyes timidly on Armand, that he might guess from the fear they seemed to express that this order was an avowal of feeling,—a first and great favor.

"You have had many griefs," she said, after a pause full of thought, and with that tenderness women often put into their voices when it is not in their hearts.

"No," answered Armand; "for until to-day I never knew happiness."

"You know it, then?" she said, looking at him from beneath her lashes with seductive hypocrisy.

"My future happiness," he replied, "must it not be in seeing you, in listening to you? Till now I have only suffered pain; henceforth I may have to endure misery."

"Ah, enough, enough!" she cried. "Now, go; it is past midnight. Respect the proprieties. I did not go to the ball, but you were there, remember. Do not let us give occasion for gossip. Adieu. I don't yet know what excuse I shall give; but a headache is a good friend that never contradicts us."

"Is there a ball to-morrow?" he asked.

"You will get accustomed to them," she said, laughing. "Well, yes; to-morrow we will go to another ball."

Armand went away the happiest man on earth, and returned every evening to Madame de Langeais at the hour when it was tacitly understood he was expected. It would be irksome, and to young people who have many such recollections superfluous, to let our story advance step by step as the poem of this intercourse flowed on, its course checked or widened at the pleasure of the duchess by a dispute of words when the sentiment went too far, or by complaint of the sentiment when words would not answer to her thought. But to mark the progress of our Penelope's web, perhaps

we ought to show what material gains the sentiment was allowed to make.

A few days after the first meeting of the duchess and Armand de Montriveau the devoted soldier had conquered, with all propriety, the right to kiss the hands of his insatiable mistress. Wherever Madame de Langeais appeared, Monsieur de Montriveau followed in attendance; so that people called him in jest "the banner of the duchess." This position soon brought him envy, jealousy, and much ill-will. The duchess had attained her object; the marquis was drawn in the train of her admirers, and she was able to humiliate those who had boasted of her good graces by publicly ranking him above them all.

"Decidedly," said Madame de Sérizy, "Monsieur de Montriveau is the man whom the duchess distinguishes."

To be distinguished by a woman means in Paris but one thing; and the stories told of the general's prowess rendered him so formidable that his younger rivals abandoned all pretensions to the duchess, and only continued to revolve in her sphere that they might make the most of the importance it gave them, or use her name and notice to advance negotiations with stars of a lesser magnitude, who were delighted to snatch adorers from Madame de Langeais. The duchess, whose perspicacity noticed all these desertions and treaties, was not their dupe; and she knew well — as Monsieur de Talleyrand, who was very fond of her, said with a smile — how to gather an aftermath of vengeance with a two-edged scoff at such morganatic espousals. Her disdainful satire contributed not a little to the awe she inspired and to her reputation for wit; and she thus strengthened

her character for virtue, all the while entertaining herself gaily by exposing the secrets of others.

Nevertheless, after two months of this comedy she began to feel in the depths of her heart a vague fear as she saw it was not in Montriveau's nature to comprehend the craft of Faubourg Saint-Germainesque coquetry, and that he took all her proceedings in deep earnest.

"My dear duchess," the old Vidame de Pamiers said to her one evening, "your friend is first cousin to the eagles. You cannot tame him; and some day, if you don't take care, he will carry you off to his eyrie."

IX.

The day after the worldly-wise old Vidame had made her this speech, which Madame de Langeais feared was only too prophetic, she began in earnest an attempt to make Armand dislike her, and became hard, exacting, nervous, and even irritable to him, — a measure he disarmed by treating her with the utmost gentleness. She knew so little of the simple goodness of noble natures that the unselfish pleasantries with which at first he met her ill-humor touched and surprised her. She was seeking a quarrel, and found cnly fresh proofs of affection. Nevertheless, she persisted.

"How is it possible," said Armand, "that a man by whom you are idolized should displease you?"

"You don't displease me," she said, becoming suddenly sweet and submissive. "But why do you want to compromise me? You can only be my friend: you must know that. I should like to find in you the delicate instinct of true friendship; so that I need not be forced to lose either your regard or the pleasure I take in our intercourse."

"Your friend! only your friend!" exclaimed Monsieur de Montriveau, to whom this terrible word was like an electric shock. "I, who have rested on the faith of the sweet hours you have granted me! I, who have waked to life since I feel myself within your heart! And to-day, without motive, without reason, you take

gratuitous pleasure in killing the hope by which I live. After pledging me such constancy, after showing such horror at women who have mere caprices, do you mean to tell me that you are like all the rest,—that you have passions and no love? Why have you asked of me my life? Why have you accepted it?"

"I have done wrong, my friend. Yes, a woman does wrong when she yields to feelings she cannot, must not reward."

"Ah, I understand! You have only been a little coquettish and—"

"Coquettish! I hate coquetry. To be a coquette, Armand, is to promise oneself to a dozen men, and to give oneself to none. At least that is how I understand our ethics. But to try to please others; to be sad with the gloomy, gay with the thoughtless, crafty with the politic; to listen with feigned attention to chatterers; to fight battles with soldiers, and grow passionate for the good of the country with philanthropists; to give to each his little dose of flattery,—why, this seems to me as necessary as to wear flowers in my hair, or diamonds, or gloves, or clothes. Such things are the mental and moral part of dress, and we put them on or off with our feathers. Surely you do not call that coquetry? But I have never treated you as I have the rest of the world. With you, my friend, I am true. I have not always agreed with your ideas; but when after long discussions you have convinced me, who has been happier than I? I love you; but only as a pure and religious woman should love. I have been thinking it all over. I am married, Armand; and though the terms on which I live with Monsieur de Langeais leave me free to dispose of

my heart as I please, yet I can go no farther: the laws of marriage, and the conventions of society forbid it. In whatever rank a woman is placed, if she offends those laws she is driven from society; and I have never yet seen the man who could understand the full meaning of that sacrifice. More than all, the break which every one foresees between Madame de Beauséant and Monsieur d'Adjuda only shows me that such sacrifices are, in many instances, the reason why men abandon us. If you sincerely love me, you will cease to see me — at least for a time. For your sake I will lay aside all my vanity. Is that nothing? What does the world say of a woman to whom no man is attached? — that she has no heart, no mind, no soul, above all, no charm. Other women will give me no credit for parting with you; they would like to tear from me the qualities they envy. But why should I care for the contest of my rivals so long as my reputation is intact? — they certainly can't acquire that! My friend, give something to one who sacrifices so much for you. Come to me less often, and I will promise not to love you less."

"Ah," replied Montriveau, with the sarcasm of a wounded heart, "love, according to scribblers, is fed on illusions! Nothing more true; I see it. I am to imagine myself loved! But let me tell you there are thoughts, like wounds, from which there is no recovery. You were my last belief: I see in you that all things here below are false."

She smiled.

"Yes," continued Montriveau in an altered voice, "your Catholic faith to which you have tried to convert me is a lie that men make to themselves. What is

hope but a lie? Pity, virtue, fear, are lying calculations. My happiness is to be a lie, is it? I am to cheat myself, and consent forever to give my gold for silver? If you can so easily dispense with my presence, if you will acknowledge me neither for your friend nor your lover, you do not love me; and I, poor fool! can say that, and know that, and yet — I love you!"

"But, my poor Armand, you are angry."

"Angry? I!"

"Yes, you think everything is at an end because I ask you to be a little prudent."

In her heart she was enchanted with the anger that flashed in his eyes. At this moment she was tormenting him, but at the same time she judged him, and observed every change in his countenance. Had the general been so unlucky as to be generous without discussion, which might easily have happened to so candid a mind, he would have been banished forever, impeached and convicted of not knowing how to love. The greater part of womankind like to feel their moral convictions violated: is it not one of their flatteries to yield only to superior force? But Armand was not wise enough to perceive the net the duchess had spread for him: strong souls that love are children still!

"If you only wish to keep up appearances," he said, artlessly, "I —"

"Keep up appearances!" she cried, interrupting him. "What an idea you have of me! Have I given you the smallest reason to think I could ever be yours?"

"Good heavens! then what are we talking about?" demanded Montriveau.

"Monsieur, you really alarm me. No, pardon me. I thank you, Armand," she continued in a freezing tone, — "I thank you for showing me in time my imprudence; believe me, an involuntary imprudence. You say you suffer; well, I will learn to suffer. We will cease to see each other; and then, when we have recovered some calmness, — well, *then* we will try to arrange for ourselves some sort of happiness approved by the world. I am young, Armand; a man without delicacy would do many things to compromise a woman of twenty-four. But you! you will always be my friend? — promise me."

"The woman of twenty-four is old enough to calculate," he answered.

He sat down on the divan and held his head between his hands.

"Madame," he said, lifting his head and showing a face full of resolution, "do you love me? Answer boldly, yes or no."

The duchess was more frightened by this question than if he had threatened to kill himself, — a vulgar trick, which does not alarm women of the nineteenth century now that men no longer wear their swords by their sides.

"Ah," she said; "if I were but free, I — "

"Is it only your husband that is in the way?" cried the general joyfully, getting up and walking with great strides up and down the room. "My dear Antoinette, I possess a more absolute power than the autocrat of all the Russias. I am on good terms with fate. I can, socially speaking, move it at my will like the hands of a watch. To guide fate in our

political machine we have only to study the mechanism. Give yourself no concern; in a short time you shall be free; and then — remember your promise."

"Armand!" she cried, "what do you mean? Good God! surely you do not think I could be the reward of a crime? Do you seek my death? Have you no religion? For myself, I fear God. Though Monsieur de Langeais has certainly given me the right to hate him, I wish him no ill."

Monsieur de Montriveau, who was beating tattoo on the chimney-piece with his fingers, contented himself by looking at the duchess with a calm smile.

"My friend," she continued, "respect him. He does not love me; he is not mine in any sense; still I have a duty towards him. To spare him the misfortunes you threaten there is nothing that I would not do. Listen," she said, after a pause, "I will not talk to you any more of separation. You shall come here as before. I will let you kiss my forehead: if I did refuse it sometimes it was pure coquetry; I admit that. But let us understand each other," she said, seeing him approach her. "I must be permitted to enlarge the number of my pretenders. I shall receive them at all hours, and in greater number than I do now. I shall be very gay, and treat you harshly, and pretend we are parted, and then —"

"And then," cried Montriveau, as he passed his arm about her and she lifted her brow to let him kiss it, "you will not talk to me again of your husband; you ought not even to think of him."

Madame de Langeais kept silence. "At any rate," she said at last, "you will do all that I ask of you,

without grumbling, without making yourself disagreeable,—will you not, dear friend? Ah, you only wanted to frighten me? Come, confess it! But tell me, have you secrets that I know nothing about? What do you mean by controlling fate?"

"At such a moment, when you confirm the gift of your heart, I am far too happy to know how I should answer you. I put my trust in you, dear Antoinette; I will have no doubts, no jealousy. *But* — if chance should set you at liberty we are united —"

"Chance, Armand!" she cried, with one of those pretty gestures of the head which seemed to mean so much, and which she gave so lightly, "chance! remember, if through you any misfortune happens to Monsieur de Langeais, I will never be yours."

They parted mutually satisfied. The duchess had made terms which enabled her to prove to all the world that Monsieur de Montriveau was not her lover; and as for him, the wily creature purposed to tire him out by granting no other favors than those he snatched in the little quarrels which she could incite or arrest as she pleased. She knew so well how to revoke on the morrow a concession granted the night before; and she was so seriously determined to remain virtuous that she saw no risk to herself in these preliminaries, dangerous as they might be to a woman really in love.

On his side, Montriveau, quite happy in having extorted the vaguest of promises, and in putting aside forever the objection raised on the score of the husband, congratulated himself on his conquest of new ground. It must be owned that he abused these rights of conquest. More youthful in heart than he had ever yet

been, he gave himself up to those childish delights which make a first love the flower of our life. He was like a child again, — pouring out his soul and his cheated passion upon the hands of his idol, upon the ripples of her blond hair, or the white brow that seemed to him so pure.

Bathed in love, the duchess lingered, hesitating to begin the quarrel which was to separate them forever. She was more of a woman than she thought she was, — the fragile creature! striving to reconcile the claims of religion with the livelier emotions of vanity and the phantom pleasure which the true Parisian idolizes. Every Sunday she heard Mass and all the offices of the Church; every evening she plunged into the intoxicating play with greater relish. Armand and Madame de Langeais were like the Fakirs of India, who are rewarded for their chastity by the temptations it offers them. Perhaps the duchess had come to persuade herself that these fraternal caresses, innocent enough in the eyes of the world, were the whole of love. How else explain the mystery of her perpetual fluctuations? Every morning she resolved to close her doors to Montriveau; every evening the appointed hour found her still beneath the charm. After fencing feebly for a while she would become less provoking, sweeter and more gracious: lovers only could have been thus to each other. The duchess displayed her natural sparkling wit and her winning ways; then, when she had brought her lover to her feet, and he had reached the *ne plus ultra* of his passion, she grew angry if he forgot himself and threatened to pass the barriers she imposed upon him.

But as no woman can really deny herself to love without a reason, Madame de Langeais looked about her for a second line of fortifications more difficult to carry than the first. She invoked the terrors of religion. No father of the Church ever preached more eloquent morality than she; never was the vengeance of the Most High better proclaimed than by the voice of our duchess. Not that she employed the phraseology of sermons, or the amplifications of rhetoric. No, indeed! she had her own especial pathos. Armand's ardent supplications she met with tearful glances, with gestures that revealed a tumult of feeling; she silenced him by imploring mercy: a word more and she could not bear it—she should perish; better death than a dishonorable happiness.

"Is it nothing to disobey God?" she would say in a voice made feeble by the inward conflict which the pretty comedian had such apparent difficulty to subdue. "Men, the world, all, I would gladly sacrifice for you; but are you not very selfish to ask of me my future life merely to satisfy your own desires? Come, tell me, are you not happy now?" she added, giving him her hand and the consolation of a glance.

Sometimes, to retain a man whose ardent love gave her new and unaccustomed emotions, or perhaps out of mere weakness, she let him snatch a few hasty kisses before she frowned and blushed and banished him to a distance.

"Your pleasures are sins that I must expiate: they cost me penitence, remorse!" she cried.

When Montriveau found himself three chairs off from those aristocratic draperies, he would begin to swear and curse his fate. Then the duchess was indignant.

"My friend," she would say drily, "I cannot unaerstand why you refuse to believe in God; for certainly it is impossible to believe in man. Be silent, and do not speak in that manner. Your soul is too noble to share the follies of liberalism which blots out God."

Discussions, theological and political, served her as shower-baths to calm Montriveau, who was too genuine to get back to love when she had once made him angry and sent him a thousand miles away from the boudoir into theories of absolutism, which she expounded admirably. Few women dare to be democratic; it puts them at odds with their own natural despotism. Sometimes, however, the general turned upon her, shook his mane, ignored politics and religion, growled like a lion, lashed his sides, and came up to his mistress terrible with emotion and incapable of holding thought and love in a leash any longer. If she then felt within her the movings of some fancy strong enough to compromise her, she would flit from the boudoir, surcharged as it was with desires, to the piano in the *salon*, and sing the sweetest airs of modern music, thus evading a struggle which perhaps she had no strength to overcome. At such moments she was sublime in Montriveau's eyes: he thought her true; he thought she loved him; he adored the resistance which made him take her — poor lover! — for a pure and saintly being. With such thoughts he resigned himself, and began to talk of friendship and the pleasures of platonic love, — he! the general of artillery!

When she had played religion long enough in her own interests, Madame de Langeais played it over again for his. She endeavored to bring him back to Christian

sentiments, and remodelled the Genius of Christianity to the special needs of the army. But here Montriveau grew impatient, found the yoke heavy, and resisted. Oh! then, by way of rebuke, my lady threatened the thunders of the Church, hoping in her heart that God would soon rid her of a man who held to his purpose with a constancy which began seriously to frighten her.

X.

If the opposition made in the name of marriage represented the civil epoch of this sentimental war, the present struggle was the religious epoch; and it had, like its predecessor, a crisis, after which its fury somewhat abated. One evening Armand, arriving rather earlier than usual, found the Abbé Gondrand, the director of Madame de Langeais' conscience, established in an armchair near the fire with the air of a man who was comfortably digesting a good dinner and the pretty sins of his penitent. At the sight of this man, with his rosy placid face, whose forehead was calm, his mouth ascetic, his glance slyly inquisitorial, and whose bearing had the true ecclesiastical dignity which threw a tint of episcopal violet on his clothes, Montriveau's face clouded over; he bowed to no one and kept silence. Outside of his love the general was not wanting in tact. He guessed, as he glanced at the embryo bishop, that here was the man who prompted the difficulties with which the duchess fenced about her love. That an ambitious priest should filch and pocket the happiness of a man of his stamp!—the thought made him boil with rage; he clinched his hands, and began to walk angrily about the room. But when he came back to his seat, resolved to give open vent to his feelings, a single look from the duchess sufficed to calm him.

Madame de Langeais, in nowise disturbed by the black silence of her lover, which would have embarrassed any other woman, continued to converse in a lively manner with Monsieur Gondrand on the necessity of re-establishing religion in all its ancient splendor. She expounded, much more cleverly than the abbé could, the reasons why the Church should be the great power temporal as well as spiritual, and regretted that the French Chamber of Peers had not a bench of bishops like the English House of Lords. However, the abbé, aware that Lent would soon give him his revenge, finally yielded his place to the general, and went away. The duchess scarcely rose to acknowledge the humble bow of her director, so occupied was she in watching Montriveau's behavior.

"What is the matter, my friend?"

"Your abbé turns my stomach."

"Pray, why did you not take a book?" she said, without caring whether the abbé, who was just closing the door, heard her or not.

Montriveau remained silent a moment, for the duchess accompanied her speech with a gesture that added to its excessive impertinence.

"My dear Antoinette, I thank you for giving precedence to love over the Church; but I beg you will permit me to ask you one thing—"

"Ah, you question me? Very well," she replied; "are you not my friend? I can show you the depths of my heart; you will find but one image there."

"Have you spoken to that man of our love?"

"He is my confessor."

"Does he know that I love you?"

"Monsieur de Montriveau, you surely do not presume to ask the secrets of the confessional?"

"Then that man does know our quarrels and all my love for you?"

"A man, Monsieur? — say God."

"God! God! I ought to be first in your heart. Leave God where he is, for his honor and mine. Madame, you shall not go any more to confession, or —"

"Or?" she said smiling.

"Or I will never see you more."

"Then adieu, Armand; adieu for ever!"

She rose and went into her boudoir without casting a single glance at Montriveau, who remained standing in the middle of the room, his hand resting on the back of a chair. How long he stood there he never knew. The soul has a mysterious power of contracting or extending time.

He opened the door of the boudoir: all was dark within.

A feeble voice gathered strength to say, "I did not ring. Why do you enter without orders, Susette? Leave me."

"You suffer?" cried Montriveau.

"Leave me, Monsieur," she answered, ringing the bell. "Leave me — at least for a moment."

"Madame la duchesse rang for lights," he said to the footman, who came into the boudoir and lighted the candles.

When the two were alone Madame de Langeais remained on the divan silent, motionless, precisely as if Montriveau were not there.

"Dear!" he said, with an accent of pain and tender kindness, "I was wrong: I would not have you without religion."

"How fortunate that you recognize the duty of conscience!" she said in a hard voice, without looking at him. "I thank you on behalf of God."

Here the general, withered by this inclemency, made a step towards the door, and was about to leave her without a word. He suffered; and the duchess in her heart was laughing at sufferings caused by a moral torture infinitely more cruel to the soldier than the tortures of his African captivity. But he was not to be allowed to go. In all crises a woman is, if we may say so, pregnant with a certain quantity of words; and when she is not delivered of them, she suffers from a sensation that things are incomplete. Madame de Langeais had by no means said her say; so she resumed:—

"I am grieved, general, that we have not the same convictions. It would be terrible for a woman not to believe in a religion which allows her to love beyond the grave. I say nothing of Christian sentiments, for you cannot understand them; but let me speak to you of the proprieties of the Christian life. Would you deny to women of the court the right of confession as a preparation for the duties of Easter? You liberals cannot kill the religious sentiment, though you may wish to do so. Religion will always be a political necessity. Do you expect to be able to govern a nation of pure reasoners? Napoleon could not; he persecuted thought. To keep the people from reasoning, you must give them sentiments. Let us accept therefore the Catholic religion with all its consequences; and if we wish the people

to go to Mass, we must go there ourselves. Religion, Armand, as you can see for yourself, is the bond of the conservative principles which enable the rich to live in safety. Religion is therefore the first of proprieties. You must admit it is a finer thing to lead a nation by moral ideas instead of scaffolds, as in the days of the Terror, — the only means your detestable Revolution found for enforcing its principles! Priesthood, monarchy, what are they? Why, they are you, they are I, they are my neighbor the princess; in a word, they are the welfare of all respectable people personified. Come, my friend, be on our side, — you who might be its Sylla if you had the least ambition. As for me, I am quite ignorant of politics, — I only reason from feeling; but I certainly do know that society will be upset if its base is to be called in question at every moment."

"If these are the opinions of your court and your government, I am sorry for them," said Montriveau. "The Restoration, Madame, should say like Catherine de Medicis, when she thought the battle of Dreux was lost, 'Well, we will go to their conventicles.' The year 1814 was your battle of Dreux. Like the throne of those days, you have gained it in appearance and lost it in fact. Political protestantism is victorious in the minds of all. If you don't want to make an Edict of Nantes, or if, making it, you revoke it, — if some day you are tried and convicted of desiring to do away with the Charter, which was a pledge given to maintain the interests of the Revolution, — a second revolution will arise which will give you but one blow. Liberalism will not be the one that is driven from France: liberalism is in the soil; nay, it is the soil itself. Men may die,

but the interests of— Good God! but what is France, the throne, legitimacy, the world itself, compared to my love, my happiness?—idle tales. Conquering or conquered, what is it all to me? Ah, where am I?"

"In the boudoir of the Duchesse de Langeais, my friend."

"No, no! no longer the duchess, nor de Langeais: I am beside my own Antoinette."

"Will you be good enough to stay where you are," she said laughing, and gently repelling him.

"Have you never loved me?" he exclaimed, with angry eyes.

"No, my friend."

But the no had the tone of a yes.

"I am a great fool," he said, kissing the hands of this terrible queen suddenly reduced to womanhood. "Antoinette," he continued, resting his head upon her feet, "you are too chaste and tender to tell our love to any one in the world."

"Ah, you are indeed a great fool!" she cried, springing up with a quick and graceful movement, and flitting into the *salon* without another word.

"What is the matter?" demanded the general, who could not guess the electric shock which the touch of his burning brow had sent from the feet to the head of his mistress.

When he reached the *salon* he heard the soft chords of the piano at which the duchess had taken refuge. Men of science or of poetic impulse, who can apprehend and enjoy without losing their enjoyment in the process of reflection, feel that notes and phrases of music are a medium which conveys the soul of the

musician, just as wood and brass are the instruments of the artificer. For them there is a music apart in the depths of this sensuous language of the soul. *Andiamo mio ben* can bring tears of joy or scornful laughter, as the singer may sing it. Often, here and there in the world, young hearts dying under the weight of hidden grief, men whose souls are wrung with the tortures of passion, seize strains of music which bring them into harmony with heaven, or soothe their anguish with some melody hiding like a poem within them.

The general now listened to such a poem, hidden away in a soul like the song of a bird lonely without its mate in the depths of a virgin forest.

"What are you playing?" he asked in a voice full of emotion.

"The prelude to a ballad called, I think, 'Fleuve du Tage.'"

"I did not know that the piano could give forth such music."

"Ah, my friend!" she said, giving him for the first time the glance of a loving woman, "neither do you know that I love you; that you make me suffer horribly; that I must find a way to complain in secret, or I should yield to you. Ah, yes, indeed you see nothing!"

"Yet you will not make me happy?"

"Armand, if I did I should die of it!"

The general left her brusquely, but when he reached the street he wiped away the tears which he had had the strength to restrain till then.

Religion lasted three months. At the end of that time the duchess, weary of her prayers, delivered over

the Church, bound hand and foot, to her lover. Perhaps she was afraid that by dint of preaching eternity she might perpetuate the general's love in this world and the next. For the honor of this woman we must believe that she was virgin, even in heart; otherwise her conduct would be too cruel. Far from the age at which men and women approach the limits of the future and cease to wrangle about their happiness, she was, not perhaps at her first fancy, but assuredly on the borders of her first love. Without experience whereby to judge, without the knowledge of suffering that might have taught her the value of the treasures poured at her feet, she was ignorantly amusing herself with them. Blind to the light and joy of love she contentedly played with its shadow.

Armand, who began at last to comprehend the singularities of this condition, counted much on the first promptings of nature. He reflected day by day, as he left Madame de Langeais, that no woman could accept for seven months the devotion of a man and so many tender and delicate proofs of it, or yield these superficial gains to his love, and betray him finally; he waited therefore the rising of the sun, confident that the fruit would ripen in due season. He understood her scruples and rejoiced in them. He thought her chaste and dignified, and he would not have had her otherwise, when in fact she was only horribly coquettish. He liked to see her raise obstacles which he could gradually overcome; and each triumph added a trifle to the slender rights which, one by one, after long withholding, she had granted with the semblance at least of love. But he so thoroughly assimilated these slight

and progressive gains, that they were soon habitual to him, and erelong he believed he had only his own hesitations to vanquish. In his heart he saw no greater hindrance to his passion than the waywardness of her who allowed him to call her Antoinette; and at last he resolved to press forward and demand all. Timid as a young lover who cannot yet believe that his idol will bow down to him, he hesitated long, and passed through terrible reactions of the heart; desires formed only to be annihilated by a look; resolutions taken which were swept away at the threshold of a door. He despised himself for not having strength to say the word, and yet he did not say it.

At last, one evening he began in a tone of sombre sadness to put forth a claim to his illegally legitimate rights. The duchess did not need any words from her slave; she knew perfectly what was in his mind. Is a man's hope ever secret? Are not women steeped in the science of deciphering every change of his countenance? Madame de Langeais stopped Montriveau at his first word.

"Would you cease to be my friend?" she asked, with a glance made lovelier by the blush which flowed beneath her transparent cheek. "As a reward for all my generosity would you bring me to dishonor? Reflect a moment. I have reflected much. I have reflected as a woman. Women have their integrity to maintain, as men maintain their honor. I could not deceive. If I became yours, I could not remain in any way the wife of Monsieur de Langeais. Therefore you exact the sacrifice of my position, my rank, my life, for a doubtful love which has lasted only seven months.

What! would you take from me my freedom, my liberty? No, no! do not speak of it; say no more."

Here the duchess with both hands put back her hair which seemed to heat her brow, and looked excited.

"You come to a feeble woman," she continued, "with calculations in your mind. You have said to yourself: 'She will talk to me of her husband for a time, then of religion; and that will be the last of her resistance. I will use and abuse the rights I have conquered: I shall then be necessary to her. I shall have on my side the ties of habit, the public recognition of my claims; the world accepts our *liaison*, and I shall be her master.' Be frank, are not these your thoughts? Ah! you calculated, and you call that love? Love! no, indeed; you merely wish me for your mistress. Well, then! the Duchesse de Langeais does not descend so low as that. Let commoner women be the dupes of your calculation,—I will never be. What surety does your love offer me? You talk to me of my beauty: I may be ugly in six months, like the dear princess, my neighbor. You are charmed with my wit, my grace: but before long you will get accustomed to them just as you get accustomed to every pleasure. Have you not already made a habit of every little favor I have accorded you? When it is too late, you will come to me and give as your sole reason for deserting me, 'I love you no longer.' Rank, fortune, honor, all that is the Duchesse de Langeais, will be swallowed up in a hope deceived, and—

"But," she resumed, "I am too kind to say more: indeed you already know it all. Now, let this end. I am too happy as I am to change the state of things.

And as for you, — has it been so very heroic to spend a few hours daily at the Hôtel de Langeais, with a woman whose chatter amused you? There are several young fops who come to see me daily, from four to six o'clock, as regularly as you come in the evenings. Are they very generous? I laugh at them; they take my whims and my nonsense in good part. They amuse me; but you, — you to whom I have really given the best within me, — you wish me evil, and cause me grief. Hush! hush!" she said, seeing him about to speak; "you have no heart, nor soul, nor delicacy. I know what you are trying to say. Well, then, *yes!* I would rather be cold, unfeeling, without a heart, without devotion in your eyes, than seem in the eyes of the world one of the common race of women who sacrifice everything to the pretended love of a man. Your selfish love is not worth such a sacrifice."

These words give but a faint idea of the sentences which the duchess warbled forth with the lively prolixity of a canary. She might have talked on indefinitely; for the poor general's sole reply to the flute-like phrases was silence teeming with painful thoughts. He perceived for the first time the coquetry of this woman, and guessed instinctively that a true devotion could not reason thus in the heart of a tender woman. Then he was stung with shame as he remembered that he had involuntarily made the calculations with which she bitterly reproached him. Examining his conscience with a candor that was almost angelic, he saw selfishness in his words, his thoughts, even in the answers which came into his mind and were smothered there. He blamed himself; in his despair the thought crossed

him of disappearing forever. The *I* paralyzed him. Of what use was it to speak of love to a woman who believed in none? How could he say to her, "Let me prove to you that I love you?" — *I*, always *I!*

Montriveau, unlike ordinary heroes of the boudoir in similar circumstances, was not wise enough to imitate the rough logician who marched before the Pyrrhonians while denying his own movement. This man of noted courage failed in audacity precisely where lovers who know the formula of female algebra are strongest. If many women, even the best, fall a prey to the calculations of clever men, it may possibly be because the latter are sound mathematicians, and know that love, in spite of its delightful poetry of sentiment, demands more geometry than we think for.

The duchess and Montriveau were alike in one respect, — they were equally inexpert in love. She knew very little of its theory, and absolutely nothing of its practice. She felt nothing, and what she knew came only through reflection. Montriveau knew little of its practice, was totally ignorant of its theory, and felt far too much to reflect at all. Both, therefore, were in the grasp of their unfortunate situation. At this moment Armand thought that all resolved itself into two words: "Be mine!" — phrase full of egotism to a woman for whom the words bore neither memories nor hopes. He was forced however to make her some reply. Though lashed by her little phrases shot like arrows, sharp, steely, stinging, delivered one after another with penetrating force, he was compelled to dissemble his anger lest he should lose all by a passionate speech.

"Madame la duchesse," he said, "I am in despair that God has appointed no other way for a woman to confirm the gift of her heart than by adding to it the gift of her person. The high price which you attach to yourself shows me that I, at least, should not attach to it a lesser. If you give me your soul and its emotions, as you say you do, what matter for the rest? If my happiness is to you so painful a sacrifice, let us say no more about it. Only, you must permit a man of honor to feel that he is humiliated in being taken for a spaniel."

The tone of these words might well have frightened any woman; but when one of these Peris is lifted above this earth and turned into a divinity, there is no pride here below that equals hers.

"Monsieur le marquis," she answered, "I am in despair that God has appointed no nobler way for a man to confirm the gift of his heart than by the manifestation of desires which are — prodigiously vulgar. In giving ourselves, we women become slaves for life; but the men who accept us commit themselves to nothing. What assurance have I that I should be always loved? The love that I should be forced to show at all times to keep you bound to me might be the very reason of your desertion. I do not choose to be a second edition of Madame de Beauséant. Who knows what it is that keeps a man faithful to a woman? Constant coldness is the secret of the constant passion of some of you; others demand a ceaseless devotion. For some, tenderness; for others, tyranny. No woman has ever yet fully fathomed your hearts."

There was a painful pause, and then she changed her tone.

"My friend, you cannot prevent a woman from trembling before the question, 'Shall I be always loved?' Hard as my words are, they come from the fear of losing you. Ah, believe me; it is not I, dear, who speaks to you, but reason. How is it that such a light creature as I can reason? Indeed, I cannot tell."

As he listened to this answer, begun in a tone of trenchant irony and ended with the sweetest accents a woman's voice could take to picture love in all its candor, Montriveau passed in a moment from martyrdom to the skies. He turned pale, and for the first time in his life he fell on his knees at the feet of a woman. He kissed the hem of her robe — but for the honor of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, let us not reveal an emotion betrayed in this boudoir, where all of love was accepted and none was given.

"Antoinette!" cried Montriveau in the delirium of joy caused by the surrender of the duchess, who was thinking herself very generous for permitting his adoration, "you are right. You shall have no room to doubt. At this moment I tremble myself, lest I lose the angel of my life. I will seek a way to make our bonds indissoluble —"

"Ah," she whispered, "you see I was right."

"Let me finish what I was about to say. I will with one word dispel your doubts. Listen! I pledge myself to die if I desert you. Be mine, and I will give you the right to kill me if I betray you. I will write a letter in which I declare reasons that compelled me to destroy myself. I will make it my last will; you shall hold it as a testament which will justify my death; you shall

know that you are avenged without danger to yourself from God or man."

"What need have I of such a document? If I lose thy love, what is life to me? If I should kill thee, would I not follow thee? No, I am grateful for the thought; but I do not want the letter. Might it not make me think my Armand faithful to me through fear? — or rather, would not this very danger lend a charm to infidelity for one who loves to risk his life? Armand, the one thing I require is the only thing that is hard for thee to do."

"What is it, love?" he whispered.

"Thy obedience, and my liberty."

"My God!" he said. "I am but a child!"

"A spoiled, yet willing child," she answered, caressing the head which still lay upon her knees. "More loved than he thinks for, yet far too disobedient. Ah, let us stay as we are! Make me the sacrifice of wishes which offend me. Why not accept what I give, if it is all that I can honestly grant? Are you not happy, Armand?"

"Oh, yes!" he answered. "I am happy — happy now that I cannot doubt your love. Antoinette! when we love, to doubt is death."

Under the strong feeling of the moment he showed himself for what he was, and grew eloquent and tenderly perceptive. The duchess, as she permitted these emotions, sanctioned perhaps by some secret and jesuitical ukase, felt all the mental excitement which made Armand's love as necessary to her as her balls or the opera. To see herself adored by a man who inspired fear in others; to make him a child, and play with him as Poppæa played with Nero, — all this was a perilous

delight which many women, like the wives of Henry VIII., have paid for with their life's blood. Well, curious presentiment! as she let him kiss the blond ripples of her hair, as she felt the pressure of the small hand of this man so honorably great, as she played herself with his black locks in the boudoir where she reigned a queen, the duchess said to herself, "This man is capable of killing me, if he once perceives that I am trifling with him."

XI.

Monsieur de Montriveau remained till two in the morning beside his mistress, who thenceforth was to him no longer a duchess, nor a Navarreins; Antoinette had pushed her deception so far as to seem a woman. During this delightful evening — the sweetest prelude that a Parisian woman ever gave to what the world would term *a fault* — the general was permitted to see her, despite the affectations of a coquettish modesty, in all the true beauty of a young girl. He might think with reason that these quarrels were like veils which wrapped a heaven-born soul, to be lifted one by one as he raised the gauze which she loved to wind about her throat. The duchess was to him the most artless and ingenuous of women, the wife of his choice; and he went away happy in the thought that having brought her to grant him so many pledges of affection, he must be to her for evermore a husband in secret, approved in the sight of God.

He went slowly homeward, following the quays that he might see the open heaven above him; his lungs breathed in more air; he needed the firmament, and the breadth of nature for his expanding heart. As he walked he questioned himself solemnly. He vowed to love this woman so religiously that she should find each day in constant happiness an absolution for her social error. Men of the stamp who dye their souls with one only sentiment feel an infinite joy in contemplating by snatches a whole life-

time of devotion, as some recluses contemplate the light divine in ecstasy. Without this belief in its perpetuity, love would be to them as nothing: faithfulness is the fabric of such love. It was thus that Montriveau comprehended his passion as he walked along in the grasp of joy.

"We are joined forever!" this thought was a talisman that held the dedication of a lifetime. He never asked himself if the duchess would change, if this love would last. No, he had faith, — a virtue without which there can be no Christian future, but which is still more necessary to societies. For the first time he conceived of life by the light of feeling, — he who had hitherto lived only in excess of human action, the devotion half corporeal of a soldier.

The following day Monsieur de Montriveau went early to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, having an appointment in a house near the Hôtel de Langeais, where, as soon as he had transacted his business, he turned his steps as if to his own home. The general was joined by a man for whom in company he appeared to feel an aversion. It was the Marquis de Ronquerolles, whose reputation was very high in the boudoirs of Paris, — a man of wit and talent, above all of courage, who gave the tone to the young men of the day; a brave man whose experience and whose success were equally envied, and who lacked neither the birth nor the fortune which add lustre to the qualities of a man of the world.[1]

[1] Montriveau and Ronquerolles belonged to the "Company of the Thirteen," — a secret society of thirteen men of rank bound by no conventional ties, recognizing no laws, obeying only their own sense of devotion, and acting all for each when any of their number needed assistance. These brothers gave each other no recognition in society; in secret, they were one soul in thirteen bodies.

"Where are you going?" said Monsieur de Ronquerolles to Montriveau.

"To the Duchesse de Langeais."

"Ah, true; I forgot that you were caught in her net. You will waste with her a love you had much better carry elsewhere. I know ten women who are worth a thousand of that titled courtesan, who does with her head what other women do with —"

"Hush!" said Montriveau, "the duchess is an angel of truth and candor."

Ronquerolles laughed. "If you have got as far as that, my dear fellow, I must enlighten you. One word, however; between us it cannot matter. Is the duchess yours? If she is, I will say no more. But tell me the truth, for I cannot let you fasten that noble heart of yours to a nature that will betray every hope you form."

When Armand had given a sketch of his situation, scrupulously relating with all his natural candor the slender rights he had won with so much difficulty, Ronquerolles burst into a fit of laughter which would have cost the life of any other man; but an observer who saw how these men looked and spoke to each other, standing alone in the angle of a wall, as far from the world of men as if they were in the middle of a desert, would have felt that they were united by some bond which no interest in life could loosen.

"My dear Armand, why did you not tell me that you were involved with the duchess? I could have given you advice that would have brought you well out of the affair. You ought to know that the women of our faubourg, like all others, delight in being bathed in

love, but only so far as possessing all without being possessed themselves. The jurisprudence of the church allows everything short of actual sin. They compound with nature. The favors which the lovely duchess doles out to you are venial faults, which she washes off with the waters of penitence. But if you had the impertinence to demand seriously the mortal sin, you would see with what profound disdain the doors of the boudoir and the hôtel would be shut in your face. Your tender Antoinette would forget all her promises; you would be less than nothing to her. Your kisses, my dear friend, are wiped off with her rouge. I know that sort of woman, — pure Parisian. Did you never notice a little *grisette* tripping daintily along? Her head is a picture, — pretty cap, fresh cheeks, coquettish hair, arch smile; the rest of her very little cared for. Is n't that a good portrait? That is the Parisian woman. Well, your duchess is all head. She feels with her head; her heart is in her head, so is her voice; she is dainty through her head. I call that poor species the intellectual Laïs. She is playing with you. If you doubt me, the proof is at hand. To-night, to-day, now — go at once and demand imperiously that she shall grant what she now refuses; even though you set about it like the late Maréchal de Richelieu."

Armand was dumb.

"Are you resolved to have her?"

"I will win her at any price," cried Montriveau desperately.

"Well, then, listen. Be as implacable as she will be; try to humiliate her, to pique her vanity, to rouse, not her heart, not her soul, but her nerves and her

lymph,—for such a woman is both nervous and lymphatic. If you can give birth to a desire in her soul you are safe. But resign all your beautiful ideas of love and tenderness. If having caught her in eagle's claws you hesitate, you yield an inch,—if an eyelash quiver, if she thinks she can still control you,—she will slip from your talons like a fish and escape, never to be caught again. Be inflexible as law. Have no more mercy than the executioner. Strike! having struck, strike again! Strike as if with a knout! A duchess is hard, my dear Armand; and it is the nature of such women to soften only under blows. Suffering gives them a heart, and it is a work of charity to strike them. When pain has wrung their nerves, slackened the fibres that you think so tender, made the heart beat back to elasticity, when the brain yields,—ah, *then* passion may enter that metallic mechanism of tears and sighs and tricks and touching phrases; then you will see the most magnificent of conflagrations,—that is to say, if the chimney takes fire. That's the kind of female steel that burns red in the forge and comes up to proof: out of it you may get love, though I doubt it. And then, moreover, is your duchess worth the trouble? Between ourselves, she might better have fallen to a man like me. I should have made a charming woman of her; she has race. But as for you two, you will stay always at the *A*, *B*, *C* of love. Ah, well! you care for her, and you can't share my ideas in the matter.

"All happiness to you!" added Ronquerolles, after a pause, laughing. "For my part I declare in favor of easy women. They are tender: they love naturally, without all these social condiments. My poor

fellow, what is a woman who only wants to inspire love? Very well as a matter of luxury, very amusing to watch at her little game of Church against Eros, white against black, her majesty against a fool, scruples against pleasure, — a very diverting game of chess, I admit, which a man who knows what he is about would check-mate in three moves. If I undertook a woman of that kind I should —"

He whispered a few words in Armand's ear, and went away brusquely that he might not hear his answer.

As for Montriveau, he made one bound across the courtyard of the Hôtel de Langeais, went up to the duchess without allowing the servants to announce him, and sought her in her bedroom.

"But this is not the thing!" she said, hastily gathering her dressing-robe about her. "Leave me, I beg of you! Go, go! Wait for me in the *salon*. Go!"

"My angel!" he said, "has a husband no rights?"

"Your manners are detestable, Monsieur. No husband has the right to surprise a wife in this way."

He came up to her, and took her in his arms.

"Forgive me, dear Antoinette, but my mind is suddenly filled with doubts, suspicions."

"Suspicions? for shame! for shame!"

"Suspicions which seem almost justified. If you loved me, would you now quarrel with me? Would you not rejoice to see me? Would you not feel some impulse of the heart? I, who am not a woman, tremble at the very tones of your voice. The desire to fall upon your neck has often assailed me in the midst of a ball —"

"Oh, if you suspect me because I do not fall upon your breast in a ball-room, I fear I shall be under

suspicion all my life! But really, in comparison with you Othello was a baby."

"Ah," he said in despair, "I am not loved!"

"At least you will admit," she said, "that you are not amiable."

"Have I still to seek to please you?"

"So it would seem. Come!" she said, with a little imperative air, "go, leave me! I am not like you; I do seek to please you."

No woman knew better than Madame de Langeais how to put grace into her insolence, and thus double its effect, — a measure which renders the coldest of men furious. At this moment her eyes, the tones of her voice, her attitudes, all expressed an ease and freedom which could not have been felt by a loving woman in presence of him who had the power to stir her heart. Armand, his wits sharpened by Monsieur de Ronquerolles, and still farther enlightened by the rapid perception which pain momentarily lends even to the least sagacious of men, and which is all-powerfully clear in strong minds, divined the terrible truth which the self-possession of the duchess betrayed: his spirit rose like a wave lashed by the winds.

"If you spoke the truth yesterday, be mine, Antoinette!" he cried. "I will —"

"In the first place," she said, repelling him calmly, "do not compromise me; my waiting-woman might hear you. Respect me, I beg. Your familiarities are very well in the evening, in my boudoir; but here — no. And pray what signifies your 'I will'? I will! No one ever dared to say that to me before. I regard it as ridiculous, — perfectly ridiculous."

"You will not yield to me on this point?"

"Ah, you call it a point?—the free disposition of ourselves! A point, truly, of some importance! and you will permit me to be, on this point, the sole judge."

"And if, trusting to your promises, I exact it?"

"Then you will prove to me that I have done wrong to make you the faintest promises, and I shall not be so foolish as to keep them. Have the goodness to leave me in peace."

Montriveau turned very pale, and was about to spring forward. The duchess rang, and as her maid entered, she said with mocking courtesy, "Do me the kindness to wait in the *salon* till I am visible."

The hardness of this woman, cold and cutting as steel, overbearing in her contempt, struck home to the mind of Armand de Montriveau. In this one moment she burst the bonds that held him to her. The duchess had read on Armand's brow the meaning of this sudden visit, and judged that the moment had come to make the imperial soldier know that a duchess might lend herself to love, but *give* herself never; and that the conquest was beyond the power even of those who had conquered Europe.

"Madame," said Montriveau, "I have not the time to wait. I am, as you once said, a spoiled child: when I seriously wish for that of which we were speaking just now, I shall have it."

"You will have it?" she said with a haughty manner, in which was mingled some surprise.

"I shall have it."

"Ah, how good of you to wish it! As a matter of curiosity I should like to know how you intend to get it."

"I am enchanted," said Montriveau, laughing in a way that really frightened her, "to have put an interest into your life. Will you permit me to take you to the ball to-night?"

"A thousand thanks, but Monsieur de Marsay has preceded you. I go with him."

Montriveau bowed gravely, and withdrew. "Ronquerolles was right," he said; "it is to be a game of chess."

From that moment the general hid his feelings under an appearance of perfect calmness, though no man has the strength to bear unshaken the rapid changes his soul must undergo as he passes from the highest happiness to supreme despair. Had he beheld a life of happiness only to feel more deeply the void of his existence? It was a terrible tornado. But he knew how to suffer; and he bore the rush of his tumultuous thoughts as the granite rock receives the onset of an angry ocean.

"I could say nothing to her; in her presence my thoughts fail. She does not know how vile and despicable she is. No man has ever dared to put this woman face to face with herself. She must have trifled with many men. I will avenge them all!"

For the first time, perhaps in the heart of man, love and revenge were so mingled that Montriveau himself could not tell for some time which had the ascendancy. He went to the ball, where he knew she would be, and was tempted to ascribe something diabolical to the gracious manner and charming smile with which she greeted him. The duchess was evidently determined

that the world should know she was not committed to Montriveau. A mutual coolness would have betrayed love; but if the duchess made no change in her manner and the marquis was cold and distant, it was apparent, of course, that the latter had gained nothing from his suit. The world is quick to recognize a discarded man, and never confounds his appearance with that of other men whom their mistresses direct to feign coldness in the hope of disguising mutual love. Every one smiled at Montriveau, who, under no such orders, was gloomy and thoughtful. Monsieur de Ronquerolles would have told him to compromise the duchess by replying to her false courtesies with demonstrations of devotion. The general left the ball-room with a keen disgust for human nature, yet hardly able to believe it so utterly perverted.

"Since there is no public executioner for such crimes," he said, looking up at the lighted windows of the rooms where the loveliest women in Paris were dancing and smiling, "I will take you by the neck, Madame la duchesse, and make you feel a blade sharper than that of the Place de Grève. Steel to steel! We will see whose heart can be cut the deepest."

XII.

During the following week Madame de Langeais continually hoped that the Marquis de Montriveau would come to her; but he contented himself by sending his card every morning to the Hôtel de Langeais. Each time that this card was brought to her she was unable to repress a shudder. Dark fears rose in her mind, — indistinct as a vague presage of misfortune. When she read that name she felt her hair in the grasp of his strong hand; sometimes it threatened vengeance, which her active fancy imaged as atrocious. She had studied him too closely not to fear him. Would he assassinate her? This man, with the neck of a bull, would he kill her with a toss of his horns; would he trample her under foot? When, how, where would he seize her? Would he make her suffer? What sort of suffering was he now preparing for her?

She repented. There were moments when if he had come to her she would have flung herself into his arms with complete surrender. Every night as she went to sleep she saw his image under some new aspect: sometimes his bitter smile, sometimes the frown of Jove his brows could wear, his lion-look, or the proud motion of his shoulders made him terrible to her mind. The next day the name on the card would seem printed in letters of blood. She lived agitated by that name far more than she had ever been by the fiery, obstinate, exacting lover. Then as the silence was prolonged, her

apprehensions deepened. She was forced to prepare herself, in solitude and without external succor, for some horrible struggle of which she could know and guess nothing. Her soul, proud and hard, was more alive to the sting of hatred than it had ever been to the caress of love. Oh, if the general could have seen his mistress, as her brows darkened with bitter thoughts in the recesses of that boudoir where once he had tasted the sweetest joys, he would have been filled with hopes that he could make her love him!

Pride, after all, is one of those human emotions which give birth to none but noble actions. Though Madame de Langeais kept the secret of her thoughts, we must believe that Monsieur de Montriveau was no longer indifferent to her. Is it not an immense conquest for a man to absorb a woman's mind? It involves making progress with her in one way or another. Put the feminine creature under the heels of a maddened horse or some other terrible animal, she will fall, of course, upon her knees, and expect death; but if the beast is merciful and does not kill her at once, she will love the horse, the lion, the bull, and speak to it with composure. The duchess felt herself at the feet of the lion; she trembled, but she did not hate him.

These two persons, thus strangely pitted against each other, met three times in society during that week. Each time, in reply to her winning welcome, the duchess received from Montriveau a distant bow and smiles which conveyed such cruel irony that all the terrors of the morning were renewed. Life is what our feelings make of it; and between these two persons feeling had now hollowed an abyss.

The following week the Comtesse de Sérizy, sister of the Marquis de Ronquerolles, gave a large ball, at which Madame de Langeais was present. The first person the duchess saw on entering the room was Armand, and she fancied that he was waiting for her. They exchanged looks. A cold sweat suddenly came from every pore of her skin. She had believed Montriveau capable of some unheard-of vengeance proportioned to the position in which they stood. The vengeance was found! It was waiting, it was hot, it was seething over! The eyes of her betrayed lover darted lightnings at her, and a satisfied hatred was on his face. With the utmost desire to seem cold and supercilious, the duchess remained silent and oppressed. She moved to the side of Madame de Sérizy, who could not forbear saying to her, —

"What is the matter, dear Antoinette? You look frightfully."

"A dance will restore me," she answered, taking the hand of a young man who then came up.

She began to waltz with a sort of nervous transport that redoubled the contemptuous gaze of Montriveau. He stood slightly in advance of the circle which surrounded the dancers, and each time that the duchess passed him his eyes seized upon her revolving head as a tiger seizes upon its prey. The waltz over, she came back to the countess, the marquis still watching her as he talked with a stranger.

"Monsieur," he said to his companion, "one of the things that struck me most in England —"

The duchess was all ears.

"Was the phrase used by the guard at Westminster

as he showed me the axe with which the masked executioner cut off the head of Charles I.; he quoted from the king himself, who said it to a bystander."

"What was it?" asked Madame de Sérizy.

"*Do not touch the axe*," answered Montriveau in a tone which seemed to the duchess like a menace.

"Really, Monsieur le marquis," she said, "you look at my neck with such a melodramatic air as you tell that old story, which any one who has been to London knows by heart, that I fancy I can almost see the axe in your hand."

These words were said in a laughing tone, though a cold chill was running through her veins.

"The story is, on the contrary, a new one," he replied.

"Ah, in what way? Pray tell me."

"In this, Madame," he answered in a low voice: "you have touched the axe."

"Delightful prophecy!" she cried, forcing a smile; "and when is my head to fall?"

"I do not wish your pretty head to fall, Madame. I only fear that some great misfortune is before you. If you were beheaded, would you not be sorry to lose that lovely blond hair, which you employ so well?"

"There are those for whom women are glad to make such sacrifices; yet sometimes they are the ones who will not overlook a woman's momentary ill-humor."

"Agreed. Well, if at once, by some chemical process, a jester were to take away your beauty and make you seem a hundred years old—"

"Ah, Monsieur," she said, interrupting him, "the small-pox is our battle of Waterloo. The day after we have lost it we know those who truly love us."

"Would you not regret that lovely complexion which —"

"Yes, very much, but less for myself than for him who might care for it. Still, if I were sincerely loved, always, faithfully, what would my beauty be to me? What do you think, Clara?"

"A rash discussion," answered Madame de Beauséant.

"Might I ask his Majesty the king of the sorcerers," continued Madame de Langeais, "when I committed the sin of touching the axe, — I, who have never been in London?"

"Not so," he said with a mocking laugh.

"When is the execution to take place?"

Montriveau drew out his watch and looked at the hour with an air of conviction that was really frightful. "The day will not end until a great misfortune has overtaken you."

"I am not a child to be easily frightened, — or rather I am a child that knows no danger," said the duchess; "and I am going to dance on the verge of the abyss."

"Delighted, Madame, to observe your strength of mind," said Montriveau, as she left him to take her place in a quadrille.

Notwithstanding her apparent disdain for the dark predictions of her lover, the duchess fell a prey to mortal terror. The moral and even physical oppression under which he held her scarcely lessened as she saw him leave the room; yet after the momentary relief of breathing at her ease she regretted the absence of fear,

so eager is the female natnre for extremes of emotion. This regret was not love, but it belonged undoubtedly to the feelings that were leading up to it. Presently the fear came back to her as she recalled the fixed conviction with which he foretold the hour of her punishment. Unable to control her terror, she left the ball-room to return home. It was then about midnight. Those of her people who were waiting in the antechamber put on her pelisse and went to call up the carriage. Once seated in it, her mind was absorbed in dwelling upon Monsieur de Montriveau's prediction. The carriage reached the courtyard, and she entered a vestibule that closely resembled her own, but suddenly perceived that the staircase was not hers. She turned to call her people, and at the same moment several men seized her, tied a handkerchief over her mouth, bound her hand and foot, and carried her rapidly away. She cried out loudly.

"Madame, we have orders to kill you if you make a noise," said a voice in her ear.

The terror of the duchess was so great that afterwards she could give no account to herself of the direction in which she was carried. When she recovered her senses she was lying, bound hand and foot with silken cords, on a sofa in the chamber of a bachelor. She could not keep back a cry as she encountered the eyes of Armand de Montriveau seated quietly in an arm-chair, wrapped in his dressing-gown and smoking a cigar.

"Make no noise, Madame la duchesse," he said, taking his cigar from his lips, "my head aches; besides, I will unfasten those cords. But you will be so good as to listen to what I have the honor to say to you."

He gently loosened the fastenings that bound her.

"Your cries will do you no good; no one can hear them; and you are far too well-bred to make a useless disturbance. If you are not quiet, if you attempt to struggle with me, I shall bind you again. I believe, however, all things considered, that you respect yourself enough to remain as you are upon that sofa, as if you were lying upon your own, cold and indifferent as ever. You have caused me to shed many bitter tears on that couch, — tears hidden from the eyes of others."

As Montriveau spoke, the duchess cast about her that furtive female glance which sees all, even when it appears most abstracted. She liked the appearance of the room, which resembled that of a monk. The mind and character of the master prevaded it. No ornament relieved the gray uniformity of the wall; the floor had a green carpet; a black sofa, a table covered with papers, a chest of drawers on which stood an alarm-clock, two large arm-chairs, and a low bed over which was thrown a red blanket with a Grecian border in black, all proclaimed the habits of a life brought down to its simplest needs. A branched candlestick on the chimney-piece recalled by its Egyptian shape the limitless deserts this man had traversed. Between the bed, whose feet like the paws of the Sphinx appeared below the folds of the red drapery, and the lateral wall of the chamber, was a door hidden by a green curtain with red and black fringes, held by large rings to a pole. The door through which the unknown hands had brought the duchess had a portière of the same stuff held back by cords.

As the duchess glanced at the curtains to compare them with each other, she noticed that the door next to the bed was open, and that a ruddy light from the

adjoining room shone, in a narrow line, at the foot of the curtain. Her curiosity was naturally roused by this light, which enabled her to see darkly through the texture of the stuff strange moving shapes; but for the moment her danger could not come from thence, and she turned her mind to a more pressing interest.

"Monsieur, is it an indiscretion to ask what you intend to do with me?" she said in a tone of cutting insolence.

The duchess believed she heard the voice of exceeding love in Montriveau's words: besides, when a man carries off a woman must it not mean that he worships her?

"Nothing at all, Madame," he answered, giving a last puff to his cigar. "You are here for a short time only. I wish to explain to you what you are and what I am. When you are attitudinizing in your boudoir I am unable to express my thoughts. If a word offends you, you pull the bell-rope and drive your lover from you as if he were a beggar. Here my mind is free; here no one can dismiss me. Here you will be my victim for a few moments, and you will have the goodness to listen to me. Fear nothing. I have not brought you here to insult you; or to obtain from you by violence that which I have not won, — that which you were not willing to grant to my affection. It would be unworthy of me. You perhaps may conceive of it; I cannot."

He threw his cigar into the fire with a careless motion.

"Perhaps the smoke annoys you, Madame?"

He rose, took a pastile from the chimney-piece, lighted it, and purified the room. The amazement of the duchess was equalled only by her humiliation. She was in the power of this man, and he did not intend to

abuse it? Those eyes, once flaming with love, were now calm and fixed as the stars. She trembled; the terror with which he inspired her was intensified by a keen sensation analogous to the motionless convulsions of a nightmare. She lay gripped by fear, fancying she saw the lurid light behind the curtain grow more vivid, as if blown by bellows. Suddenly the glow deepened; she saw distinctly three masked men, and then the whole vanished so suddenly that she fancied it might have been an optical delusion.

"Madame," resumed Armand, looking at her with contemptuous coldness, "a moment, a single moment, will suffice to strike you through every moment of your future life, — it is the only future that remains for us. I am not God. Listen to me attentively," he added, making a pause as if to give solemnity to his words. "Love will always come at your will: you have a power that is unlimited over men. Recollect that one day you called to you a man's love. It came, pure, honest, — as much so as it ever was or could be upon this earth; as respectful as it was violent; tender as the love of a woman, or that of a mother for her child; so vast, that it became a folly. You trifled with that love; you were guilty of crime. It is a woman's right to refuse the love she does not share. The man who cannot win her is never pitied; he has no cause for complaint. But, Madame la duchesse, to feign love, and draw to yourself a man deprived of natural affections; to teach him the knowledge of happiness in all its plentitude only to tear it from him; to rob his life of joy; to kill him not for time but for eternity; to poison every hour, every thought, — that I denounce as crime — "

"Monsieur!"

"I cannot permit you to answer me yet. Listen again: I have rights over you, though I shall exert only those of a judge over a criminal. If you had no conscience I should not blame you. But you are so young, surely you must have the life of youth in your heart; at least I like to think so. You are not too degraded to feel the meaning of my words, though you have debased yourself to commit a crime unpunishable by law."

At this moment the duchess heard the dull sound of bellows with which the unknown figures seemed to rouse the waning fire whose light now shot through the curtain; but Montriveau's lightning glance compelled her to be still and fix her eyes upon him; his words indeed were more to her than the crackling of that mysterious flame.

"Madame," he continued after a pause, "when the executioner puts his hand upon a hapless wretch, and lays his neck upon the plank where the law demands that an assassin shall lose his head, you know of it, every one knows of it, for the newspapers inform both rich and poor, — the rich that they may sleep in peace; the poor that they may take warning. Then you who are religious and even devout, you hasten to offer masses for the soul of that assassin; and yet — you are one of the same stock, the elder branch of it. Your branch fears nothing; you can live happy and careless. Driven by hunger or rage your brother, the galley-slave, has killed a man; you — you have slain a man's happiness, his life, his faith. The other waited for his victim openly, and slew him at his own risk in spite of the terrors of the guillotine; but you! — you

have heaped wrongs upon one who was innocent of wrong to you; you tamed a heart that you might devour it at your ease; you enticed it with caresses, omitting none that could lead it on to desire all; you required sacrifices that you might discard them; you made that man see the light, and then you struck him blind. A noble courage! Such infamies are luxuries unknown to the commoner women at whom you sneer. They at least know how to give and to forgive; they love and suffer. They make men paltry by the grandeur of their devotion. Go higher in society, and we find all the mud of the streets, but it is hardened and gilded. Yes, to find that which is absolutely ignoble we must look for education, a great name, a beautiful woman, a duchess. To fall so low, one must be born so high!" He paused a moment.

"I express myself ill: I suffer from the wounds you have given, but I do not complain of them. No, my words are not the expression of personal hope, neither do they contain personal bitterness. Rest assured, Madame, that I forgive you; and this forgiveness is so full that you cannot complain that I have brought you here, though against your will. Nevertheless, you may make other hearts suffer as mine has suffered. In their interest I am inspired with a desire for justice. Expiate your fault, and God may pardon you, — at least I hope so."

At these words the eyes of the woman now beaten down and torn in mind filled with tears.

"Why do you weep? Be faithful to your nature. You have watched without pity the tortures of a heart you have broken. Others may tell you that you give

them life; to me you have given annihilation. Perhaps you have guessed that I do not belong to myself; perhaps you will tell me to live for friends, and bear the chill of death, the grief of life, with them. Is that your thought? it is kind indeed! Are you like the tigers of the wilderness who make the wound and then lick it?"

The duchess burst into tears.

"Spare yourself those tears, Madame. If I believed in them at all it would be as a warning. Are they or are they not one of your stratagems? After all those that I have seen you employ, how could I believe in your emotions? Nothing about you has the power to move me now. I have said all."

Madame de Langeais rose with a movement that was full of dignity and yet was humble.

"You have the right to treat me harshly," she said, holding out to him a hand which he did not take. "Your words are not harsh enough. I deserve this punishment."

"Punishment! Madame, I punish you? To punish is to love. Expect nothing from me that resembles feeling. I might indeed on my own behalf be accuser, judge, and executioner; but, no, — I shall accomplish presently a duty, not a revenge. The worst vengeance to my thinking is to disdain that which is in our hands. Who knows? perhaps I shall be the minister of your future happiness. In bearing, as you will, the mark of your criminality, you may be forced to the repentant life of a criminal. Then, perhaps, you may learn to love!"

The duchess listened with a submission that was neither feigned nor calculated. She spoke, after an interval of silence: —

"Armand," she said, "I thought that in resisting love I obeyed the chaste instincts of a woman; and it was not from you that I expected such reproach. You take my weakness and call it crime. Did you not see that I was sometimes drawn beyond my duty by the thoughts, unknown to me, of love; and that on the morrow I was grieved, distressed, at having gone so far? Alas! I sinned through ignorance. There was, I swear to you, as much good faith in the minutes when I yielded to my feelings as there was in the hours of my remorse. And then, what is it you complain of? The gift of my heart did not suffice, you demanded brutally — "

"Brutally!" exclaimed Montriveau; then he said within himself, "If I enter a war of words with her I am lost."

"Yes, you came to me as to some bad woman; without respect, with none of the courtesies of love. Had I not the right to pause, to reflect? Well, I have reflected. What was unseemly in your conduct is excusable. Love was its motive; let me think so, and justify you to my own heart. Armand, to-night as you uttered that prophecy of evil I was thinking of our happiness. I had confidence in the noble character of which you have given me so many proofs. I was all yours —" she added, bending to his ear. "Yes, I had a strange new desire to give happiness to a man so sorely tried by adversity. Master for master! I asked for a noble man. The higher I felt myself, the less I could look down. Trusting in you, I thought of a lifetime of love at the moment you predicted death. Strength is never without mercy: my friend, you are

too strong to be cruel to a poor woman who loves you. If my faults have been many, will you not forgive them? Let me repair them: repentance is the grace of love, and, oh! I would be gracious to thee! Could I alone of all women be without fears, doubts, timidities, before the step that was to bind my life, — that tie that men break so easily? Those common women to whom you compare me, they yield, but they struggle. I too have struggled, but — I am here. Oh, God!" she cried, interrupting herself, "he will not hear me!" she wrung her hands. "But I love thee! I am thine!" she fell at his feet: "thine! thine! my only master!"

"Madame," said Armand, offering to raise her, "Antoinette cannot save the Duchesse de Langeais. I trust neither the one nor the other. You give yourself to-day, you will refuse yourself to-morrow. No power in earth or heaven can assure me of the gentle fidelity of your love. Pledges were for the past, — our past is gone forever."

At this moment the red light blazed up so vividly that the duchess involuntarily turned her head towards the portière and saw distinctly three masked men.

"Armand," she said, "I would not think ill of you. Why are those men here? What are you preparing to do to me?"

"Those men are as silent as I shall be myself on all that passes here: they are my hands and my heart. One of them is a surgeon —"

"A surgeon!" she said. "Armand — my friend! uncertainty is great suffering. Speak, tell me if you seek my life. I will give it to you; you need not take it."

"You have not understood me," said Montriveau.

"Did I not speak to you of justice? To quiet your fears," he added coldly, taking a piece of steel which lay upon the table, "I will explain what I have decided to do to you."

He showed her a small cross of two bars, fastened to the end of the steel. "My friends are heating a cross like this; we shall apply it to your forehead, — there, between the eyes, where you cannot hide it with diamonds, and escape the inquiries of your world. You will bear upon your brow a mark as infamous as that which brands the shoulder of your brother, the convict. The pain will be nothing; but I feared some agitation, some resistance —"

"Resistance!" she cried, striking her hands joyfully together. "No! no! I would that all the world were here to see it. Ah, my Armand, quick! mark, mark thy creature as a poor little thing of thine! Proofs of my love? they are all here in one. Ah, I see only mercy and pardon, happiness unspeakable, in thy revenge. When thou hast marked me for thine own, when my soul humbly bears thy red cipher, thou canst not abandon me. Then, then, I am forever thine! Isolate me from the world, for thou wilt take care of me: if not, thou wouldst be a coward, — and I know thee noble, great. Ah, the woman who loves will mark herself! Come, gentlemen, come quickly! brand the Duchesse de Langeais. She belongs to Monsieur de Montriveau now and ever. Come! all of you! my forehead burns hotter than your iron."

Armand turned quickly that he might not see the duchess kneeling before him. He said a word, and his friends disappeared from the adjoining room. Women

accustomed to the life of *salons* understand the play of mirrors: the duchess, eager to read his heart, watched him in the one that was before her. Unconscious of this, Montriveau wiped away a tear. The whole future of the duchess seemed in that tear; and when he turned to raise her she was standing. She believed he loved her; and the shock was terrible when he said, with that incisive firmness she had herself so often used when she was trifling with him, —

"I absolve you, Madame. Believe me, this scene will be as if it had never taken place. But here and now we say farewell. I like to believe that you were sincere in your boudoir in your seductions, and sincere now in this outpouring of your heart. Farewell! my faith is dead. You would torment me still; the duchess would be always there. Ah, no matter; farewell, we can never understand each other.

"What would you like to do?" he added, changing his tone to that of a master of ceremonies. "Will you go home; or would you like to return to Madame de Sérizy? I have employed all my power to protect your reputation; neither your people nor society can ever know what has happened during the last hour. Your people think you still at the ball; your carriage is in Madame de Sérizy's courtyard, your coupé is in your own. Where would you like to go?"

"What do you think best, Armand?"

"There is no Armand here, Madame la duchesse. We are strangers to each other."

"Take me to the ball, then," she said, wishing to put his power to the proof. "Throw back into the purgatory of the world a woman who has suffered and must

continue to suffer there, since for her there can be no joy. Oh, my friend, I do love you, — even as those commoner women love. I would put my arms about your neck in the ball-room, if you asked it. The world is vile, but it has not corrupted me. I am young, and love has made me younger. Yes, I am a child, — thy child, for thou hast created me. Oh, Armand! do not banish me from my Eden!"

Montriveau made a gesture.

"If I must go, let me take something with me, some trifle, — this, to put upon my heart to-night," she said, picking up one of his gloves and folding it in her handkerchief. "No," she continued, "I am not of that depraved world of heartless women. You do not know them, or you would distinguish me from them. Some give themselves for money, some for jewels; all are vile. And yet, my Armand, there are those among us who are noble, chaste, and pure. Would that I had all their noble qualities to place them at your feet! Do you seek a love beneath you, rather than one whose devotion is allied to greatness? Then, oh, my Armand! I would be a simple *bourgeoise,* a working-woman, to please thee. Misfortune has made me a duchess, — and yet I would I were born near the throne that I might lay down all for thee!"

He listened, moistening a cigar.

"Let me know when you are ready to go," he said.

"But if I wish to stay?"

"That is another thing."

"Look, this one is ill made," she cried, taking a cigar, and putting it to her lips.

"What! you smoke?" he said.

"I would do all things to please you."

"Very well: then go, Madame!"

"I obey," she answered, weeping.

"Cover your eyes that you may not see the way by which I take you.

"I am ready, Armand," she said, blindfolding herself.

"Can you see?"

"No."

He softly knelt at her feet.

"Ah, I hear thee!" she exclaimed, with a lovely gesture of joy, for she thought his feigned harshness was about to cease.

He offered to kiss her lips; she bent towards him.

"You can see, Madame?"

"A little."

"You deceive me again! always!"

"Ah!" she said, with the anger of an honor misunderstood, "take off this handkerchief and lead me, Monsieur; I shall not open my eyes."

Armand, convinced by this cry, led forward the duchess, nobly blind; and as he held her hand with paternal care to show her where to place her feet, and how to go up or down, he studied the quivering pulses which betrayed a heart now throbbing with a first true love. Madame de Langeais, happy in being able thus to speak to him, tried to tell him all; but he remained inflexible. When her hand questioned his, he gave no answering pressure. At last he told her to step forward alone; she obeyed. As she did so he held back her dress that it might not catch in a narrow aperture through which she passed. Madame de Langeais was deeply touched by this little action; it betrayed a lingering love. It was in fact Montriveau's last farewell; he left her without another word.

XIII.

When she felt herself alone in a warm atmosphere the duchess opened her eyes. She saw that she was in Madame de Sérizy's boudoir, and her first care was to arrange the disorder of her dress and restore the poetry of her *coiffure.*

"My dear Antoinette," exclaimed the countess, opening the door of the boudoir, "we have looked for you everywhere."

"I came here for a little fresh air," she said; "it is so intolerably warm in the *salons.*"

"We thought you had left, but my brother Ronquerolles told me your people were still waiting for you."

"I am very tired, dear; let me rest here for awhile."

"What is the matter? you are trembling."

The Marquis de Ronquerolles entered. "I fear, Madame la duchesse, that some accident may happen to you. I have just seen your coachman, and he is as drunk as the Twenty-two Cantons."

The duchess did not answer: she was looking at the chimney, the mirrors, the walls, — striving to detect the opening through which she had passed. Then the overpowering sense of being thrust back into the gayeties of a ball-room after the terrible scene which had changed forever the current of her life overcame her, and she began to tremble violently.

"My nerves are shaken by that prediction of Monsieur de Montriveau," she said, "though it was only a jest. I must go home and see if the London axe will pursue me in my dreams. Adieu, dear; adieu, Monsieur le marquis."

She crossed the ball-rooms, detained frequently by flatterers whom she looked at with strange pity. She felt how small her world had been when she, its queen, was thus humbled and abased. Oh! what were all these men beside the one she loved, — compared to him whose character, freed from the pettiness she had forced upon it, now stood forth in her mind, perhaps with fond exaggeration, in the noblest proportions?

She found her servants waiting and asleep.

"Have you left the antechamber this evening?" she asked.

"No, Madame."

As she got into her carriage she saw that her coachman was drunk, — a danger which would have frightened her under other circumstances, but the great shocks of life arrest all vulgar fears. She reached home safely; but knew herself changed and in the grasp of an unknown emotion. For her there was from henceforth but one man in the world; that is to say, for one only did she desire to have a value. If physiologists can promptly define love by the light of the laws of nature, moralists find far more difficulty in explaining it when considered with the developments given to it by society. Nevertheless there exists, in spite of the heresies of the thousand and one sects that divide the church of love, a straight and clear-cut line passing sharply through their doctrines; a line which discussion

cannot bend, and whose inflexible truth explains the crisis into which the Duchesse de Langeais, like many other women, was now plunged. She did not love as yet: she had a passion.

Love and passion are two states of the soul which poets, men of the world, philosophers, and fools continually confound. Love carries with it a mutuality of feeling, a certainty of joys that nothing can take away, a constant interchange of happiness, and a confidence between two beings so complete as to exclude all jealousy. Possession is then a means, not an end. Infidelity may cause suffering, but cannot detach love. The soul is not more, nor is it less, ardent or agitated; it is ceaselessly happy. Spread through all time, as if by a divine breath, desire takes but one tint; the sky of life is blue as the blue of the purest heavens.

Passion is the foreteller of love and its infinitudes, to which all suffering souls aspire. Passion is hope, which may be deceived. Passion signifies both suffering and change; passion ceases when hope is dead. Men and women can, without dishonoring themselves, feel more than one passion: is it not natural for the heart to stretch out towards joy? In life there is but one love. All discussions written or spoken upon this feeling may be summed up in two questions: Is it a passion? Is it love?

As love cannot exist without the mutual joys that perpetuate it, the duchess was now under the yoke of passion: she was passing through the consuming agitation, the parching desires, the involuntary calculations, that are expressed by the one word *passion.* She

suffered. Amid these troubles of her soul rose the lesser tumults of vanity, self-love, pride, and dignity,—forms of egotism which are allied to each other. She had said to a man: "I love thee—I am thine!" Could the Duchesse de Langeais say these words in vain? Either he must love her, or she must lay down her social sceptre. She wrung her hands and writhed upon her bed, crying out: "I must be loved!" and the faith she still kept in herself revived her courage. The duchess was stung, the proud Parisian was humiliated; but the true woman clung to hope, and her imagination, resenting the lost time of joy, went before to picture the inextinguishable happiness of love. She well-nigh attained to a perception of it; for as a doubt of Montriveau's affection stung her, she found a sudden joy in saying to herself, "I love him!" The world and the Church—she was ready to lay them at his feet: Armand was her religion.

Madame de Langeais passed the following day in a species of moral coma, joined to bodily agitations that nothing can express. She tore up many letters as soon as she had written them; and allowed her mind to float on impossible conjectures. She tried to believe that Montriveau would come to her at the hour of his former visits, and waited for it eagerly: her whole being was concentrated on the single sense of hearing. She closed her eyes at times that she might force herself to listen, as it were, through space: then came the wish to annihilate all substances between herself and her love, that she might obtain that absolute silence which allows sound to reach us from long distances. In this concentration of her mind the ticking of the clock in

the boudoir was agony to her; it was like a sinister foreboding chatter, and she stopped it. Midnight sounded from the *salon.*

"My God!" she cried, "to see him would be joy. Once he came drawn by love; his voice filled this room, — and now, vacancy! nothing!"

Remembering those scenes of coquetry that once she played to his injury, tears of despair flowed down her cheeks.

"Madame la duchesse is perhaps not aware that it is two in the morning," said her waiting-woman. "I feared that Madame was ill."

"Yes, I am going to bed: but remember, Susette, never to enter my room unless I ring. I shall not tell you twice."

For a week Madame de Langeais went to all the houses where she hoped to meet Monsieur de Montriveau. Contrary to her custom she went early and came away late. She gave up dancing, and played cards. Fruitless expectation! She neither saw him, nor dared to utter his name. At last, overcome by a momentary despair, she said one morning to Madame de Sérizy with as much indifference as she could assume: "Have you quarrelled with Monsieur de Montriveau? I have not seen him at your house lately?"

"No, he does not come any more," answered the countess laughing; "he does not go anywhere. He is probably occupied with some woman."

"I thought," said the duchess gently, "that the Marquis de Ronquerolles was intimate with him?"

"I never heard my brother say that he even knew him."

Madame de Langeais made no reply. Madame de Sérizy took advantage of her silence to lash a friendship which had long been bitter to her, and she resumed, —

"Do you regret that gloomy individual? I have heard shocking things about him. Wound him, and they say he never forgives; love him, and he will put you in chains. When I complain of him, I am told by those who laud him to the skies that he knows how to love. I am constantly told of his great heart, of his devotion to his friends. Bah! society does not want such noble souls. Men of that kind are all very well among each other, but I wish they would stay there and leave us to our own little mediocrity. Don't you think so, Antoinette?"

In spite of her social self-possession, the duchess seemed agitated, but she replied with an ease of manner that deceived her friend, —

"I am really sorry not to see him any more, for I felt a great interest in him, — even a sincere friendship. You may think me absurd, dear friend, but I do prefer the nobler natures. To care for fools seems to me a proof that we have senses and not souls."

As Madame de Sérizy had never "distinguished" any but commonplace men, and was at this time much occupied by a handsome fop, the Marquis d'Aiglemont, she made no reply.

Madame de Langeais caught at the hope conveyed by this retreat from the world, and wrote to Montriveau a tender, humble letter fitted to bring him back to her if he still loved her. She sent it early in the morning by her footman, whom she questioned on his return. When the man assured her that he had given it into the hands of the marquis himself, she could scarcely restrain

her joy. Armand was in Paris! alone, at home, shut up from the world! During all that day she waited for the answer. None came. Through a series of hourly renewed expectations Antoinette found constant reasons for the delay. Armand was hesitating; perhaps the answer might be sent by post. But towards night she could deceive herself no longer. Day of anguish, mingled with sufferings that brought pleasure, throbbings of the heart which suffocated, struggles of the mind that shortened life! The next day she sent to Monsieur de Montriveau for the answer.

"Monsieur le marquis sends word that he will come to see Madame la duchesse," answered Julian.

She fled to the sofa in her boudoir that she might hide her joy.

"He is coming!" The thought rent her soul.

Those who have never known the storm and strain of such waiting, and the fructifications of hope that pass through it, are devoid of the clear flame which makes manifest to the soul the pure essence of a desired object as much as its actual reality. To love and wait, — is it not to drain the cruse of hope that never fails? — to yield one's self up to the flail of passion, happy through all the disillusions of the truth? Love's waiting, the emanation of vital force and desire, is to the human soul like the fragrant exhalations of certain flowers. We leave the gorgeous and sterile beauty of the tulip and the coreopsis to breathe the perfumed thought of the orange-flower and the volkemeria, — two blossoms which their native lands have likened involuntarily to youthful brides, lovely in their past, lovelier in their future.

The duchess learned the joys of her new birth as she felt with a species of intoxication these scourgings of love, and saw through her changed emotions new vistas and nobler meanings in the things of life. As she hastened to her dressing-room she understood for the first time the true value of dress and all the delicate minute cares of the person when dictated by love and not by vanity: already these things were helping her to bear the burden of suspense. Her *toilette* finished, she fell back into painful agitation, into all the nervous horrors of that dread power which sends its fermenting leaven through the mind, and is perhaps a disease whose anguish is dear to us.

She was dressed and waiting by two in the afternoon: at half-past eleven at night Montriveau had not arrived. To picture the agony of this poor woman, who may be called the spoiled child of civilization, we should need to tell how many poems the heart can concentrate into one thought, to weigh the essence exhaled by the spirit at the vibrations of a bell, or measure the vital forces spent and lost as carriage-wheels roll on and on without stopping.

"Can he be trifling with me?" she asked herself as she heard the clock strike midnight.

She turned pale; her teeth chattered as she struck her hands together and sprang up, quivering, in that boudoir where so often, she remembered, he had come unasked. Then she resigned herself. Had she not forced him to turn pale and quiver under the lash of her irony? Madame de Langeais now learned the miseries of a woman's destiny when, deprived of those means of action which relieve men, she can only love and wait.

To seek her lover is a fault few men will pardon; the majority see degradation in that celestial flattery. But Armand's soul was of a nobler sort; might he not be among the lesser number of those who reward such excess of love by an eternal devotion?

"Yes! I will go," she cried, tossing sleepless on her bed: "I will go to him; I will stretch my hands to him and never weary. A man like Armand will see in every step I take to him a promise of constancy and love. Yes! the angels descend from heaven to men. I will be to him an angel."

On the morrow she wrote one of those letters in which the spirit of the ten thousand Sévignés of Paris excel. And yet to ask for pity without humiliation, to fly to him swift-winged and never droop to self-abasement, to complain but not offend, to rebel with tenderness, to forgive without lowering a just dignity, to tell all and yet to avow nothing, — surely it needed the Duchesse de Langeais trained by the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry to write that enchanting letter.

Julian was despatched with it: Julian, like others of his calling, was the victim of the marching and countermarching of love.

"What answer did Monsieur de Montriveau send?" she asked, as carelessly as she could, when he came to give an account of his mission.

"Monsieur le marquis desired me to say to Madame la duchesse that it was well."

Horrible reaction of the hoping heart, — to receive before inquisitive witnesses the answer that crushed it! forced to silence, forbidden to murmur! This is one of the thousand pangs in the lot of the wealthy.

For twenty-two days Madame de Langeais wrote to Monsieur de Montriveau without obtaining any reply. At last her strength gave way, and she made the excuse of illness to escape her duties to the princess and also to society. She received only her father the Duc de Navarreins, her great-aunt the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, her maternal great-uncle the Vidame de Pamiers, and the uncle of her husband the Duc de Grandlieu. These persons readily believed in Madame de Langeais' illness when they found her day by day paler, thinner, more depressed. The vague unrest of a real love, the irritations of wounded pride, the sting of the only scorn that had ever reached her, the springing hopes forever formed, forever cheated, — all these passions uselessly excited wore upon her many-sided nature. She was expiating the past of her wasted life.

From this seclusion she emerged for a day to attend a review in which the general was to take part. Stationed with the royal family in the balcony of the Tuileries, the duchess enjoyed one of those hidden festivals of the heart whose memory lingers long through coming years. Her languor added to her beauty, and all eyes welcomed her with admiration. She exchanged a few glances with Montriveau, whose presence was the secret of her exceeding loveliness. The general marched past at her feet in all that pomp of military accoutrement which avowedly affects the feminine imagination, even that of the strictest prudery.

To a woman deeply in love, who had not seen her lover for two months, such a moment, fleeting as it was, must have seemed like the phase of a dream which reveals to our sight the fugitive vision of a land without

horizon. Women and very young men can alone imagine the absorbed yet passionate avidity which filled the eyes of the duchess. If men in their early youth and in the paroxysms of their first passion have passed through these phenomena of nervous force, they forget them so completely in later years that they deny the very existence of such luxurious ecstasy, — the only term by which we can represent these glorious intuitions. Religious ecstasy is the exaggeration of thought released from corporeal bonds; whereas, in the ecstasy of love, the forces of our dual nature mingle, unite, embrace each other. When a woman falls a prey to the tyranny of passion, such as that which now subjugated Madame de Langeais, she resolves rapidly, and by succeeding steps of which it is impossible to render an exact account. Thoughts are born one of another, and rush through the soul as clouds chased by the wind flee across the gray depths which veil the sun. Acts alone reveal the current of such thoughts. Here, then, are the acts which were the outcome of this woman's mind.

On the morrow the Duchesse de Langeais sent her carriage and liveries to wait at the door of Monsieur de Montriveau from eight in the morning till three in the afternoon. The marquis lived in the Rue de Seine, not far from the Chamber of Peers, where there was to be on that day a special sitting. Long before the Peers assembled, however, a few persons had noticed the carriage and the liveries of the duchess, — among them a young officer who had been repelled by Madame de Langeais and welcomed by Madame de Sérizy: the Baron de Maulincour. He went at once to his new

mistress, delighted to tell her, under promise of secrecy, of this amazing folly. Instantly the report spread telegraphically through the coteries of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, reached the Château and the Élysée-Bourbon, and became the news of the day, — the topic of all conversations from midday till midnight. Nearly all the women denied the fact in a manner which confirmed the truth of it; all the men believed it with much indulgent sympathy for Madame de Langeais. "That savage, Montriveau, has a heart of iron," they said, flinging the blame on Armand; "he has exacted this exposure."

"Well," said others, "Madame de Langeais has committed a generous imprudence. To renounce before the eyes of all Paris her rank, her fortune, her fame for her lover is a feminine *coup d'état*, as fine as that cut of a barber's knife which electrified Canning at the assizes. Not one of the women who blame her would have made this sacrifice, — worthy, indeed, of the olden time. Madame de Langeais is an heroic woman to act out the truth that is in her. She can love no one but Montriveau after this. Well, there is grandeur in saying openly: 'I will have but one passion!'"

"What will become of society, Monsieur, if you thus do honor to open vice without respecting virtue?" said the wife of the attorney-general, the Comtesse de Grandville.

XIV.

While the Château, the Faubourg, and the Chaussée d'Antin were discussing the shipwreck of this aristocratic virtue, while lively young men were dashing on horseback through the Rue de Seine to see with their own eyes the carriage that proclaimed Madame de Langeais' presence with Montriveau, she herself was lying trembling in her darkened boudoir; Armand, who had chanced not to sleep at home, was walking in the Tuileries with his friend de Marsay; and the relations of the duchess were going from one to another making appointments to meet at her house, intending to reprimand her and take measures to stop the scandal.

At three o'clock the Duc de Navarreins, the Vidame de Pamiers, the old Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, and the Duc de Grandlieu were assembled in the *salon* of the Hôtel de Langeais. To them, as to all other inquirers, the servants answered that their mistress was out; the duchess had made no exception in favor of any one. These four personages — illustrious in that high sphere of which the Almanach de Gotha keeps the sacred record and annually sets a seal upon its changes and hereditary pretensions — demand a rapid sketch, without which this social picture would be incomplete.

The Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry was the most poetic female relic of the reign of Louis XV., to whose

surname she had, it was whispered, during her gay youth contributed her quota. Of her various early charms none remained but a nose remarkably prominent, thin, and curved like a Turkish blade, — the chief feature of a face which bore some resemblance to an old white glove, — a few crimped and powdered curls, slippers with prodigious heels, lace caps with ribbon knots, black mittens, and *des parfaits contentements.* To do her justice we must add, that she had herself so high an opinion of her ruins that she went bare-necked in the evening, wore gloves instead of sleeves, and painted her cheeks with the classic rouge of Martin. An alarming amiability in her wrinkles, a lively fire in her eyes, a portentous dignity in her carriage, a triple fork of malice on her tongue, an infallible memory in her head, made this old woman an actual power in society. The parchment of her brain held as much information as the archives of the Charter itself, and kept the record of all princely and ducal European alliances down to the very last drops of the blood of Charlemagne. No usurpation of titles could escape her. Young men anxious to be well thought of, ambitious men with a purpose, and all young women paid her perpetual homage. Her *salon* gave the law to the Faubourg Saint-Germain and the dicta of this female Talleyrand were accepted as final. Some persons came to her for information and advice on etiquette and the usages of society; others to take lessons from her faultless good taste. Certainly no old woman knew how to pocket her snuff-box with such dignity; and when she sat down, or merely crossed her legs, she gave to the sweep of her petticoats a grace and precision for which all elegant

young women sighed in vain. Her voice had stayed in her head throughout the greater part of her life, but she had not been able to keep it from getting into the membranes of her nose, which gave it a singular and significant ring. Out of her former property she had recovered 150,000 francs worth of woodland, generously returned by Napoleon; so that everything about her was important, from her worldly means and position, to her marked individuality.

This curious fossil was seated on a sofa at the corner of the fireplace, talking to the Vidame de Pamiers, another contemporaneous ruin.[1] This old noble, formerly a Commander of the Knights of Malta, was tall, slim, and lean; his neck was buckled in so tightly that the cheeks fell a little over the cravat and compelled him to carry his head extremely high, — a posture which would seem consequential in many, but in him was the natural expression of a thoroughly Voltairean mind. His prominent eyes seemed to see, and in fact did see, everything. He always put cotton in his ears. In short, his person in its entirety was a perfect model of aristocratic lines, — fragile, supple lines, slender and agreeable, able, like those of a serpent, to bend or erect themselves at pleasure, and glide or stiffen as he chose.

The Duc de Navarreins was walking up and down the room with the Duc de Grandlieu. Both were men of fifty-five years of age, — still fresh, fat, short, well-nourished, rather florid; with weary eyes, and their under-lips slightly pendulous. Except for the elegance

[1] *Vidame,* — feudal title of those who held the lands of a bishopric on condition of defending them.

of their language and the affable courtesy and perfect ease of their manners (which could in a moment change to insolence), a superficial observer might have taken them for a couple of bankers, — an error checked by the first words of their conversation, which was hedged with precautions against those whom they held in awe, dry or empty for their equals, and perfidious towards their inferiors, whom, as courtiers and statesmen, they knew how to win with verbal flattery, and stab, on occasion, with an unexpected word.

Such were these notable examples of a great nobility which chose to die unless it could remain its former unchanged self; which deserves praise and blame in equal portions; and which will never be adequately understood until some poet portrays it, happy in obeying its king and in perishing by the axe of Richelieu, but despising the guillotine of '89 as a low and contemptible revenge.

These four individuals were remarkable for thin shrill voices, curiously in harmony with their ideas and their deportment. Perfect confidence existed among them; yet their court habit of concealing all emotion kept them from openly expressing their displeasure at the folly of their young relation. To disarm my critics, and prevent them from fastening on the puerilities with which the following conversation opens, I must remind them that Locke, when in company with certain English lords renowned for their wit and distinguished for their manners as well as for their political integrity, amused himself by taking down their conversation at short-hand, and caused them to roar with laughter as he read aloud the result and asked them to say what they

could make of it. The truth is, the upper classes in all nations have a certain jargon and glitter of talk, which, if burned in the embers of literary or philosophical thought, leave a very small residuum of gold in the crucible. On all planes of social life, if we except a few Parisian *salons*, an observer will find the same absurdities, differing from one another according to the thickness or transparency of the varnish. Thus solid conversation is exceptional in society; Bœotian dulness carries the day and the burden of talk through all the various strata of the upper world. If in that social world men are obliged to converse, they are certainly permitted to think but little. Thought is fatiguing, and wealthy people want their lives to flow on without effort. If we put wit into a scale, sliding from the *gamin* of Paris to the peer of France, we shall understand Monsieur de Talleyrand's saying that "manners are everything," — a polite translation of the legal maxim that *La forme emporte le fond.*

To the mind of a poet the language of the lower classes will always have the advantage of giving a rough stamp of poetry to their thoughts. These observations explain in part the barren emptiness of ordinary social life, its want of real depth, and the repugnance which superior men and women feel to such unprofitable interchange of their thoughts.

The Duc de Navarreins suddenly stopped short as if struck by a bright idea, and said to his companion, —

"Have you sold Thornton?"

"No; he is lame. I am afraid I shall lose him. He is a capital hunter. Do you know how the Duchesse de Marigny is?"

"No; I did not call this morning. I was just going there when you came to tell me about Antoinette. She was very ill yesterday, and they despaired of her life. She received the last sacraments."

"Her death will alter your cousin's prospects?"

"Not at all. She divided her property in her lifetime, and kept only a pension, which was paid to her by her niece, Madame de Soulanges, to whom she made over the estate at Guébriant for an annuity."

"She will be quite a loss to society. A good woman. The family will lose her advice and experience, which had real weight. Between ourselves be it said, she was the head of the house. Her son, Marigny, is amiable enough; he is witty and can talk; he is agreeable, very agreeable — oh! as for agreeable, that 's not to be denied; but he has no idea whatever of conducting himself. Still — it is very extraordinary — he is clever. The other day he was dining at the club with all those rich fellows of the Chaussée d'Antin, and your uncle (who is always there, you know, for his game of whist) saw him. Surprised to meet him there, he asked him if he belonged to the club. 'Yes; I don't go into the world any longer. I live with the bankers.' You know why, of course?" added the duke with a sly smile.

"No."

"Because he is infatuated with a pretty bride, — that little Madame Kellner, daughter of Gondreville, — a woman, they say, who is all the fashion among that set of people."

"Antoinette must be enjoying herself, I think," remarked the old vidame to his companion at the corner of the fireplace.

"The affection I feel for that dear child has obliged me to spend my morning in a singular way," replied the princess, pocketing her snuff-box.

"My dear aunt," said the duke, stopping before her, "I am in despair. Only one of those Bonaparte men is capable of exacting such an impropriety. Between ourselves, why did not Antoinette make a better choice?"

"My dear nephew," answered the princess, "the Montriveaus are an ancient family and well connected: they are related to all the high nobility of Burgundy. If the Rivaudoult d'Arschoot of the Dulmen branch should come to an end in Gallicia, the Montriveaus will succeed to all the titles of Arschoot; they inherit through their great-grandfather."

"Are you sure?"

"I knew it better than the father of this man, whom I used to know very well, and to whom I told it. Though a knight of several orders, he ridiculed distinctions. He was a student,—a perfect encyclopædia. But his brother made a great deal out of the emigration. I have heard that his relatives at the north behaved admirably to him."

"Yes; that is true. The Comte de Montriveau died at St. Petersburg, where I met him," said the vidame. "He was a large man, with an incredible passion for oysters."

"How many could he eat?" asked the Duc de Grandlieu.

"Ten dozen every day."

"Without indigestion?"

"None at all."

"But that is most extraordinary! Did not they give him gout, or stone, or some other inconvenience?"

"No; he had perfect health, and died from an accident."

"An accident! If nature prompted him to eat oysters he probably needed them; up to a certain point our predominant tastes are the conditions of our existence."

"I am of your opinion," said the princess, smiling.

"Madame, you are very satirical," said the duke.

"I only wished to show you that such sentiments would not be acceptable to younger women," she answered. Then she interrupted herself, and added, "But my niece! my niece!"

"Dear aunt," said Monsieur de Navarreins, "I cannot believe that she has really gone to Monsieur de Montriveau."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the princess. "What is your opinion, vidame?"

"If the duchess were an artless girl I should think—"

"A woman in love is always artless, my poor vidame: decidedly you are getting old," said the princess.

"What is to be done?" demanded the duke.

"If my dear niece is wise," answered Madame de Chauvry, "she will go to Court this evening. Happily this is Monday, a reception day. We will take care to have her well surrounded, and give the lie to this ridiculous rumor. There are a thousand ways of explaining it; and if the Marquis de Montriveau is an honorable man he will lend himself to any of them. We will make the pair listen to reason."

"It would be difficult to break a lance with Monsieur de Montriveau, dear aunt. He is a pupil of Bonaparte,

and he has a position. Bless me! he is a *seigneur* of these days, a commander of the Guard, an important man. He has not the slightest ambition; if he takes offence, he is just the man to say to the King, 'There is my resignation, — leave me in peace.'"

"What are his opinions?"

"Very bad indeed."

"As for that," remarked the princess, "the King himself is what he always was, — a jacobin *fleur-de-lised.*"

"Oh, somewhat modified!" interposed the vidame.

"No; I know him of old. The man who pointed to the Court and said to his wife the first time they dined in public, 'These are our people,' is neither more nor less than a black scoundrel. I recognize MONSIEUR in the King. The shameless brother who voted as he did in the Constituent Assembly probably conspires now with the liberals, and consults them. This philosophical bigot is quite as dangerous for his younger brother as he was for his elder; in fact, I don't see how the next reign will get out of the troubles this big man with a tiny brain has been pleased to create for it. Besides, he hates the Comte d'Artois, and would like to die with the thought that he could not reign long."

"My dear aunt, he is the King. I have the honor to serve him, and —"

"But, my dear nephew, your duties do not deprive you of the right of private judgment, do they? Your house is as ancient as that of the Bourbons. If the Guises had had a shade more resolution, his Majesty would be only a plain gentleman to-day. I am going out of the world at the right time — nobility is dead.

Yes, everything is at an end for you, my children," she added, looking at the vidame. "Is the conduct of my niece to be made the talk of the town? She has done wrong; I don't approve of her. A useless scandal is a great mistake. But, after all, I doubt the story. I brought her up, and I know that—"

At this moment the duchess emerged from her boudoir. She had recognized her aunt's voice, and had heard the name of Montriveau. She wore a long, loose morning-dress, and as she came into the room Monsieur de Grandlieu, who happened to be looking out of the window, saw the carriage enter the court-yard empty.

"My dear daughter," said the Duc de Navarreins, kissing her on the forehead, "are you aware of what is going on?"

"Is anything extraordinary going on, dear father?"

"All Paris thinks you are with Monsieur de Montriveau."

"Dear Antoinette, you have not been out, have you?" said the princess, holding out her hand, which the duchess kissed with respectful affection.

"No, dear aunt, I have not been out. But," she added, turning to the vidame and the Duc de Grandlieu, "I intended that all Paris should think me with Monsieur de Montriveau."

The duke raised his hands to heaven, struck them despairingly together and folded his arms.

The old princess rose quickly on her prodigious heels and looked at the duchess, who blushed and dropped her eyes. Madame de Chauvry drew her gently to her side and said, "Let me kiss you, my little angel."

Then she kissed her forehead tenderly, pressed her hand and added, smiling, "We are no longer under the Valois, dear child. You have compromised your husband and your position in the world. But we can undo it all."

"But, my dear aunt, I want nothing undone. I wish all Paris to think and say that I spent this morning with Monsieur de Montriveau. Destroy that belief, false as it is, and you will do me the greatest harm."

"My daughter," said the duke, "do you wish to be lost and cause your family great unhappiness?"

"My dear father, my family in sacrificing me to its own interests gave me over, without intending it, to irreparable misery. You may blame me for seeking to soften my fate, but you certainly must pity me."

"This is what it is to take the utmost pains to marry our daughters suitably," murmured the duke to the vidame.

"Dear child," said the princess, shaking off the grains of snuff that had fallen on her dress, "find solace where you can; it is not a question of hindering your happiness, but of keeping it within certain limits. We all know that marriage is a defective institution made tolerable only by love. But is it necessary in taking a lover to proclaim it on the Carrousel? Come, be reasonable and listen to what we say."

"I am listening."

"Madame la duchesse," said the Duc de Grandlieu, "if uncles were obliged to take care of their nieces, there would be but one business in life; and society would owe them rewards, honors, and the distinction due to the servants of a king. I have not come here

to talk to you about my nephew; I am thinking solely of your interests. Let us consider. If you are resolved to make an open break, let me tell you this: I know Langeais; I don't like him. He is miserly and selfish as the devil. He will separate from you, but he will keep your fortune and leave you penniless, and consequently without position in the world. The hundred thousand francs you lately inherited from your maternal great-aunt will go to pay for the jewels of his mistresses, and you will be tied, garroted by the laws, and compelled to say *amen* to all that he does. Suppose Monsieur de Montriveau should break with you? My dear niece, don't tell me that a man never abandons a young and pretty woman. The supposition is forced, I admit; but have we not seen many charming women, princesses among them, neglected and abandoned? Then where will you be, without a husband? Manage the one you have just as you take care of your beauty, — which is, after all, together with the husband, the tail of a woman's kite. I wish you to be happy and beloved; let us look therefore at the future. Happily or unhappily you may have children. What will you call them? Montriveau? Well, they cannot inherit their father's fortune. You will wish to give them yours; he will wish to give them his; but the law steps in and forbids it. How often we read of suits brought by heirs-at-law to dispossess the children of love! All over the country this happens daily. Suppose you bequeath your property in trust to some third person. Such a person may betray that trust; but justice cannot reach him, and your children will be ruined.

"Choose your path," he continued, "with your eyes open. See the difficulties which hedge you. Your children will be sacrificed to a mere fancy and deprived of their position in the world. So long as they are young it may be all very well, — they will be charming; but sooner or later they will reproach you for having thought more of yourself than of them. We old men know all this only too well; children grow to manhood, and men are thankless. Have I not heard that young de Horn, in Germany, say after supper, 'If my mother had been an honest woman, I should have been the reigning sovereign.' This IF has sounded in our ears all our lives from the lower classes, and the end of it has been the Revolution. When men can't complain of their fathers and their mothers, they complain of God, and of that state of life to which he has called them. Now, my dear child, we have come here to open your eyes to all this. I will sum it all up in two words, — a woman should never give her husband the chance to condemn her."

"Uncle, my life was all calculation. I calculated so much that I could not love. I saw, as you do, self-interest where now I see only feeling."

"But, my dearest child, life is a tangle of interests and feelings," exclaimed the vidame. "To be happy, we should try, more especially placed as you are, to combine feelings with interests. Let a *grisette* make love as she likes, — that's all very well; but you have a pretty fortune, a family, a title, a place at Court, and you must not throw them out of the window. What is it we ask of you? Merely to conciliate the proprieties, and not fly in the face of them. *Mon Dieu*, I

am nearly eighty years old, and I do not remember under the old régime a single lover who was worth the sacrifice you are ready to make for this fortunate young man."

The duchess silenced the vidame with a look; and if Montriveau had seen her then he would have pardoned everything.

"This would make a fine scene on the stage," exclaimed the Duc de Grandlieu; "and yet because it concerns your paraphernalia, your position, your independence, it has no effect. My dear niece, you are not grateful. You will not find many families where the relations are courageous enough to give the lessons of their experience, and talk plain common-sense to giddy young heads. Renounce your salvation if you wish to be damned,—I have nothing to say about that; but when it comes to renouncing your income, I don't know any confessor that can absolve you from the pains of poverty. I think I have the right to say these things, because if you rush to perdition I shall be the one to offer you a refuge. I am Langeais' uncle, and I alone can put him in the wrong by such a step."

"My daughter," said the Duc de Navarreins, rousing himself from a painful meditation, "as you speak of feelings, let me tell you that a woman who bears our name should have other feelings than those that belong to women of a lesser grade. Do you wish to yield to the liberals, to those Jesuits of Robespierre who seek to dishonor us? There are certain things that a Navarreins cannot do; it is not you alone who are dishonored, it is your house."

"Come," said the princess, "do not let us talk of dishonor. My dear sons, don't make quite so much of an empty carriage, and leave me alone with Antoinette. Come and dine with me, all three of you. I take upon myself to settle this affair in a proper manner. You men don't understand things; you put a great deal too much sharpness into what you have to say. I shall not let you quarrel with my dear niece; be so good as to go away."

The three gentlemen, guessing that the princess would do better without them, made their bow and departed; the Duc de Navarreins saying to his daughter as he kissed her brow: "Come, my dear child, be wise; it is not too late."

"I wish we could find in the family some vigorous young fellow who would pick a quarrel with this Montriveau and make an end of him," said the vidame, as they went downstairs.

XV.

"My treasure," said the princess, making a sign to her pupil to take a low chair which was beside her, "I know nothing here below so calumniated as God and the eighteenth century. As I look back to the days of my youth, I cannot recall a single duchess who trod propriety under foot as you are doing. Scribblers and romance-makers have vilified the reign of Louis XV.; don't believe them. The Dubarry, my dear, was worth a dozen of that widow Scarron; she was a much better person.

"In my day a woman knew how to save appearances and keep her dignity. Indiscretion has been our bane; it is the root of the evil. Philosophers and all the other nobodies whom we admitted into our *salons* had the ingratitude and the impropriety in return for our bounty to make a schedule of our hearts, and decry us collectively and individually, and rail at the century. The masses, whose chance to judge of anything, I don't care what, is very small indeed, saw results only, and knew nothing of the ways that led to them. But in those days, dear heart, men and women were quite as remarkable as in any other epoch of a monarchy. None of your Werthers, none of your notables as they call themselves, not one of your men in yellow gloves, whose trousers nowadays conceal their skinny legs,

would have crossed Europe disguised as a peddler, to shut himself up, at the risk of his life from the poniards of the Duke of Modena, in the dressing-room of the regent's daughter. Which of your consumptive little dandies with their tortoise-shell eyeglasses would have hid for six weeks in a closet, like Lauzun, that he might give courage to his mistress in the pains of child-birth? There was more passion in the little finger of Monsieur de Jaucourt than in your whole race of wranglers who leave a woman's side to vote for an amendment. Find me to-day a single Court page who would let himself be hacked to pieces and buried under a stairway, merely to kiss the gloved fingers of a Konigsmark! One would really think the sexes had changed places, and that women were expected to devote themselves to men. The men of to-day are worth a great deal less, and think themselves worth a great deal more, than they were in my day. My dear, those adventures which they have raked up to assassinate our dear, good Louis XV. were all done in secrecy. If it had not been for a set of petty poets, scandal-mongers, and scavengers, who gossipped with our waiting-women and wrote down their calumnies, our epoch would have held its own in literature as to manners and morals. I am defending the century, and not its accidents. There may have been a hundred women of quality who lost themselves; but fools said there were a thousand, just as they estimate the enemy's dead on a battle-field. And after all, I don't know why the Revolution or the Empire need fling reproaches at us. I am sure they were licentious enough; without wit, coarse, vulgar—faugh!

all that was revolting! They make the vile spots on our history.

"This preamble, my dear child," she continued after a pause, "is simply to tell you that if you care for Montriveau, you are free to love him as much as you please, and as long as you can do so. I know, by experience, that short of locking you up (and we can't lock people up in these days) you will do as you please; that is what I should have done at your age, — except, my darling, that I should never have abdicated my rights as Duchesse de Langeais. Come, behave with propriety. The vidame is quite right; no man is worth a single one of the sacrifices which women are fools enough to make in return for their love. Keep yourself always in your position, my child; and then if things go wrong and you have reason to regret your course, well then, you are still the wife of Monsieur de Langeais. When you grow old, you will be glad enough to hear Mass at Court instead of in some country convent. There! that's the whole of it in a nutshell. Imprudence means an annuity, a wandering life, being at the beck and call of a lover; it means mortification at the hands of women who are not worthy of you, simply because they are more vilely clever. You had far better go to Montriveau after dark, in a hackney-coach, disguised, than send your empty carriage in broad daylight. You are a little goose, my child. Your carriage flattered his vanity, but your presence would have won his heart. I have told you the exact truth, but I am not the least angry with you. You are two centuries behind the times with your superb sacrifice. Come! let me arrange the matter. I shall say that

Montriveau made your people drunk to gratify his vanity, and compromise you — "

"For Heaven's sake, dear aunt," cried the duchess, springing to her feet, "don't calumniate him!"

"Ah, dear child!" said the princess, whose eyes lighted up, "I should love your illusions if they were not so dangerous for you; but all illusions fade. You would melt my heart if it were not too old. Come, darling, make no one wretched, — neither yourself, nor him, nor those who love you. I take upon myself to satisfy all parties. Promise me that you will do nothing without consulting me. Tell me everything, and I think I can guide you safely."

"Dear aunt, I promise — "

"To tell me all?"

"Yes, all, — that is, all that can be told."

"But, my treasure, it is precisely what can not be told that I wish to know; we must understand each other thoroughly. Come, let me press my withered old lips upon your sweet brow. No, no! I forbid you to kiss my dry bones; old people have a politeness of their own. Take me down to my carriage," she added, after kissing her niece.

"Dear aunt; then you think I might go to him disguised?"

"Well, yes, — it can always be denied," said the old woman as she went downstairs.

The duchess caught this idea alone from the sermon which the princess had preached to her. When Madame de Chauvry was safely in her carriage, Madame de Langeais bade her tenderly adieu, and returned radiant to her own room.

"My presence would have won his heart!" she repeated. "Yes, my aunt is right. A man cannot reject a woman if she seeks him rightly."

That evening at the reception of Madame la Duchesse de Berri, the Duc de Navarreins, Monsieur de Marsay, Monsieur de Grandlieu and the Duc de Maufrigneuse, triumphantly denied the offensive rumors which were current about the Duchesse de Langeais. So many officers and others asserted that they had seen Montriveau walking in the Tuileries during the morning, that the foolish story was laid to the door of chance, which takes all that is given to it. The next day the reputation of the duchess became, in spite of her efforts to blacken it, as spotless and bright as Mambrino's helmet after Sancho had polished it.

At two o'clock that afternoon Monsieur de Ronquerolles rode up to Montriveau in a secluded alley of the Bois de Boulogne, and said, smiling, "How goes the duchess?—Strike on, strike ever!" he added, suiting the action to the word and applying his whip significantly to his beautiful mare, which dashed away with him like a bullet.

Two days after this futile exposure, Madame de Langeais wrote a letter to the marquis, which remained unanswered like all its predecessors. This time, however, she had taken her measures and bribed Auguste, Montriveau's valet. At eight o'clock that evening she went to the Rue de Seine, and was ushered by Auguste into a room altogether different from the one in which the former secret scene had been enacted. There the duchess learned that the general would not be at home

that evening. "Has he two homes?" she asked. The valet would make no reply. Madame de Langeais had bought the key of the room, but not the sterling integrity of the man himself. When she was left alone she saw her fourteen letters lying on a small round table, still sealed, unopened: not one had been read! At this sight she fell into an arm-chair and for a moment lost consciousness. When she came to herself, she found Auguste holding vinegar to her face.

"A carriage, quick!" she said.

When it came, she ran down to it with convulsive rapidity, returned home and went to bed; telling the servants to deny her to every one. She remained thirty-six hours in her bed, letting no one approach her but her waiting-maid, who brought her from time to time a cup of orange-flower infusion. Susette heard her mistress utter a few low moans, and saw traces of tears in the sweet eyes which shone out with feverish light from the dark circles around them. On the succeeding day, after long and despairing meditation on the course she must now pursue, Madame de Langeais had a conference with her man of business, and apparently gave him instructions to make certain preparations. Then she sent for the Vidame de Pamiers, and while waiting for his arrival she wrote again to Monsieur de Montriveau.

The vidame was punctual. He found his young cousin pale, dejected, but resigned. It was about two in the afternoon. Never had this divine creature seemed so poetic as she now did in the weariness of her anguish.

"My dear cousin," she said to the vidame, "your eighty years have obtained for you this rendezvous. Oh,

do not smile at a poor woman who is in the deepest grief! You are a man of honor, and the events of your youth, I hope and believe, have inspired you with indulgence for women."

"Not the smallest!" he said.

"No?"

"They are happy in it all," he answered.

"Ah! — Well, you are in the heart of my family; you may be, perhaps, the last relative, the last friend, whose hand I shall ever press. I may therefore ask of you a last kindness. Do me, dear vidame, a service which I cannot ask from my father, nor from my uncle Grandlieu, nor from any woman. You will understand me. I entreat you to obey me, and to forget in future days that you have obeyed me, — no matter what may be the issue of your action. It is to carry this letter to Monsieur de Montriveau, to see him, to give him the letter, to ask him as one man can ask of another, — for you have among you a straightforwardness of feeling which you abandon in your treatment of women, — ask him to read this letter; but not in your presence, for men wish to hide emotions from each other. I authorize you, if you cannot otherwise get his consent, to tell him it is a matter of life or of death to me. If he deigns — "

"Deigns!" exclaimed the vidame.

"If he deigns to read it," continued the duchess with dignity, "say to him one last word. You will see him at five o'clock; he dines at home, alone, at that hour: I know this. Tell him he must for sole answer come and see me. If three hours later, — if at eight o'clock he has not left home, all will be over; the Duchesse de Langeais will have left this world. I shall not

be dead, dear, — no; but no human power will ever find me on this earth. Come and dine with me. Let me have a friend beside me in my last agony. Yes; to-night, dear cousin, my life will be decided, one way or the other. Whichever way it is, the future must consume me. Silence! I can listen to nothing; neither to entreaties nor advice. Come, let us talk, let us laugh," she cried, holding out to him a hand which he kissed. "Let us be like two old philosophers who enjoy life up to the moment of their death. I will dress, I will make myself very coquettish for you, — you may be the last man that sees the Duchesse de Langeais."

The vidame made no reply; he bowed, took the letter and did his errand. He returned at half-past five o'clock and found his cousin dressed with care, exquisitely. The *salon* was decorated with flowers, as if for a fête; the dinner was delicious. The duchess called up her sparkling wit and all her sweet attractions for the old man's pleasure. At first he tried to treat all these seductions as a charming jest; but from time to time the false magic of her gayety grew dim; he saw her shiver with sudden terror, or listen, as if she heard into the depths of silence. If he then said to her, "What is it?" she answered, "Hush!"

At seven o'clock the duchess left the room, but soon returned, dressed as her waiting-woman might have dressed for a journey. She took the arm of her guest, asking him to accompany her. They entered a hired coach, and at a quarter to eight were before the door of Monsieur de Montriveau.

Armand all this while was reading and considering the following letter: —

My Friend, — I have passed a few moments in your room without your knowledge. I have brought back my letters. Oh, Armand! from you to me this cannot be indifference; and hatred would act otherwise. If you love me, cease this cruel comedy. You will kill me. Erelong, when you perceive, too late, how deeply I have loved you, you will fall into despair.

If I am mistaken, if you feel only aversion for me, then all hope is over: aversion means contempt, disgust; and from those feelings men make no return. Terrible as this may be, the thought of it will comfort my coming woe; you will have no regrets. Regrets! ah, my Armand! I fain would think I cause you none, — not one. No; I will not tell you of the havoc within me.

I must live, and cannot be your wife! After giving myself utterly to you in my thoughts, to whom must I now give myself? To God. Yes, the eyes which you have loved for a moment shall look upon no other man: may God's mercy close them! I shall hear no living voice of man but thine, so tender once, so cruel yesterday, — yesterday, for I am still in the morrow of your vengeance. May the word of God consume my soul, and take it from this earth! Between his anger and thine, oh, my friend! what is left for me but prayers and tears?

You will ask me why I write to you. Do not be angry if I cling to a last ray of hope; if I give a last sigh towards the happy life before I leave it forever. My position is terrible. I am calm, with the stillness that a great resolution lends to the soul, — the stillness left by the departing echoes of a storm. In that terrible adventure which first drew me towards you, my Armand, you went from the desert to an oasis, led by a faithful guide. I drag myself from the oasis to the desert, driven forth by your pitiless hand. Yet you alone, my friend, can comprehend the pang with which I look backward to my days of joy; to you alone can I tell my grief without a blush. If you forgive me, I shall be happy; if you

are inexorable, I will expiate my wrong-doing Is it not natural that a woman should wish to live in the memory of him she loves, clothed with all high and generous feelings? Oh, my only dear one! suffer your handmaid to bury herself away from sight in the dear hope that you will think her noble and true! Your harshness has compelled me to reflect; and since I have loved you so well, I have come to think myself less guilty than you deem me. Listen to my defence! I owe it you: and you, who are all the world to me, do you not owe me a moment's justice?

I now know, through my own anguish, how much my conduct must have made you suffer; but I was then so ignorant of love! You who have known the secret torture, — you compel me to bear it! During the eight months we were together, you did not make me love you. Why was that? I cannot tell you any more than I can tell you why it is that I now love you. Yes, certainly I was flattered to be the object of such passionate affection, — to see the ardor of your eyes; and yet they left me cold and without desires. I was not a woman. I knew nothing, I imagined nothing, of the devotion or of the happiness of my sex Whom shall I blame for this? Would you not have despised me if I had feigned a love I did not feel? Is it noble in a woman to reward a passion she does not share? Perhaps there is no merit in giving one's self up to love when we ardently desire it? Alas, my friend! I may tell you now that these thoughts came to me when I was so coquettish with you; but you seemed to me so noble, so lofty, that I could not bear to let you win me out of pity. Ah! what am I writing?

I have taken back my letters. They are burned. You will never know the love, the passion, the madness they revealed.

I stop. I will be silent. Armand, I will say no more about my feelings. If my love, my prayers, cannot reach from my soul to your soul, neither can I, a woman, owe your

love to pity. I must be loved irresistibly, or cast off ruthlessly. If you refuse to read this letter, it will be burned. If, having read it, you are not three hours later my husband — my only husband, forever mine — I shall feel no shame in knowing that it is in your hands. The pride of my great despair will protect me from all sense of degradation, and my end shall be worthy of my love.

You yourself, meeting me no more in this world though I still be living, — you will not think without a quiver of the woman who three short hours hence will breathe only to fold you forever in her love, or else to live on hopeless, lifeless, yet faithful, — faithful, not to mutual memories, but to feelings misunderstood and cast away. The Duchesse de Lavallière wept for her lost happiness, her vanished power: the Duchesse de Langeais' sole happiness must be her tears, but evermore she will be a power in your soul. Yes; you will regret me. I feel that I was not meant for this world, and I am grateful to you for proving it to me.

Adieu! you cannot touch my axe: yours was that of the executioner; mine is that of God. Yours killed; mine shall save alive. Your love was mortal; it could not bear disdain or ridicule, — mine bears all things, and cannot weaken; it lives immortally. Ah! I feel a dreary joy in rising thus above you, — you who felt yourself so great; in humbling you with a calm, protecting smile like that of the angels sitting at the feet of God, who obtain the right and the power to watch over men. You have had passing hopes, desires; but the poor nun will light your path with ceaseless prayers, and hold you in the shelter of the love divine.

I foresee your answer, Armand; and I bid you come to me — in heaven. Friend, strength and weakness are both admitted there; both are sufferings. This thought quells the anguish of my last trial. I am so calm that I should fear I loved thee less were it not for thee that I quit the world.

ANTOINETTE.

"Dear vidame," said the duchess when they reached Montriveau's house, "do me the kindness to ask at the door if he is at home."

The vidame, obedient as a man of the eighteenth century, got out of the carriage, and presently returned with a "Yes" that made her shiver. She took him by the hand and let him kiss her on both cheeks. Then she begged him to go away without watching her or seeking to protect her.

"But the passers-by?" he said.

"No one could show me disrespect," she answered.

It was the last word of the woman of the world, of the duchess. The vidame went away. Madame de Langeais remained at the threshold of the door wrapped in her mantle, waiting till the hour of eight. The clock struck. The unhappy woman waited still ten minutes — a quarter of an hour. Then she saw a last humiliation in the delay, and hope forsook her. She could not repress one cry. "Oh, my God!" she said, and left the fatal threshold. It was the first word of the Carmelite.

XVI.

Montriveau had a conference that evening with several of his friends. He urged them to bring it to a close; but his clock was slow, and he only left his house to go to the Hôtel de Langeais at the moment when the duchess, driven by chill anguish, was rushing on foot through the streets of Paris. She was weeping when she reached the Boulevard d'Enfer. There for the last time she saw Paris, smoking, noisy, filled with the lurid atmosphere produced by the street-lamps. Then she got into a hired carriage, and quitted the great city, never to enter it again.

When the marquis reached the Hôtel de Langeais and was told that the duchess was out, he thought himself led into a trap, and rushed impetuously to the vidame, who received him just as he was putting on his dressing-gown and thinking of the happiness of his pretty cousin. Montriveau gave him that terrible look whose electric shock could paralyze both men and women.

"Monsieur, have you lent yourself to a cruel jest?" he cried. "I have just come from the Hôtel de Langeais, and the servants say that the duchess is out."

"A great misfortune must have happened through some fault of yours," answered the vidame. "I left the duchess at your door —"

"At what hour?"

"A quarter to eight."

Montriveau rushed home precipitately, and asked his porter if he had seen a lady at the door. "Yes, Monsieur, a beautiful lady who seemed in trouble. She was crying like a Madeleine, but without making a noise, and standing straight up like a reed. At last she said out loud, 'Oh, my God!' and went away. It made our hearts ache, my wife and I, who were close by without her seeing us."

The stern man turned pale, and staggered as he heard these words. He wrote a line to Monsieur de Ronquerolles, and sent it instantly; then he went up to his own room.

Towards midnight Ronquerolles came. "What is the matter, my dear friend?" he said, on seeing the general.

Montriveau gave him Madame de Langeais' letter.

"Well?" asked Ronquerolles, when he had read it.

"She came to my door at eight o'clock; at a quarter past eight she had disappeared. I have lost her, and I love her. Ah! if my life belonged to me I would blow my brains out."

"Nonsense!" said his friend. "Be calm; a duchess does not run away like a milkmaid. She cannot do more than ten miles an hour; we, all of us, will do twenty. The deuce!" he added. "Madame de Langeais is not an ordinary woman. We will, one and all, be on horseback early in the morning. Before then, we shall find out from the police what road she has taken. She must have a carriage; this kind of angel does not have wings. We can know at once whether she has left Paris or is hidden here. We shall find her, of course. Besides, have we not the telegraph to stop her, even if we did not follow her? You will

be happy. But, my dear brother, you have committed the error of which all men with your strength of will are more or less guilty. You all judge of others by yourselves; you never rightly see how far human strength can go without breaking under the strain. Why did you not consult me this evening? I should have said to you, 'Be punctual.' Early to-morrow morning, then!" he added, grasping Montriveau's hand, as he stood silent and motionless. "Sleep now, if you can."

But every resource that statesmen, sovereigns, ministers, bankers, — in fact, all human powers, — could socially bring to bear, was employed in vain. Neither Montriveau nor his friends could find the slightest trace of the Duchesse de Langeais. She was evidently cloistered. Montriveau resolved to search, or cause to be searched, every convent in the world; he would have the duchess though it cost the lives and destruction of a city.

To do justice to this man's character, we must state that his passionate ardor rose day after day with the same fire, and lasted unslackened for five years. It was not till 1829 that the Duc de Navarreins learned by chance that his daughter left Paris for Spain as waiting-maid to Lady Julia Hopwood; and that she quitted the latter at Cadiz without exciting suspicion that Mademoiselle Caroline was the illustrious duchess whose disappearance was then the chief topic of interest in the great world.

The feelings with which these lovers met at last, — parted by the iron grating of the Carmelites, — in the

presence of the Mother Superior, can now be understood in all their intensity; and their violence under such terrible reawakening will doubtless explain the final scenes of this history.

The Duc de Langeais having died in 1824, his wife was free. Antoinette de Navarreins was living, wasted with grief, on a rock in the Mediterranean. But there was hope, — the Pope might annul the vows of Sister Theresa. Happiness, bought by so much love and anguish, might yet blossom for these lovers. Such thoughts sent Montriveau on the wings of the wind from Cadiz to Marseilles, from Marseilles to Paris.

Some months after his return to France a merchant brig, equipped for fighting, left the Port of Marseilles for the coast of Spain. She carried a number of French gentlemen of high distinction, who were smitten with a passion for the East, and were on their way to visit those regions. The intimate knowledge which Montriveau possessed of the manners and customs of that fabled land made him a most desirable companion for such a journey, and they invited him to accompany them. To this he consented; and the Minister of War made him a Lieutenant-General, and placed him on a Committee of the Artillery, that he might be free to join this party of pleasure.

The brig dropped anchor, twenty-four hours out of port, to the north-westward of an island not far from the coast of Spain. The vessel had been chosen for her light draught and slender sparring, so that she could without danger run in close to the reefs which, on that side, add to the strong defence of the rocky coast. If the fishing vessels or the inhabitants of the little town

perceived the brig at her anchorage, they could scarcely feel anxiety, so inaccessible was the island on that side: moreover, precautions were taken to explain her presence. Before sighting the island, Montriveau had run up the flag of the United States. The seamen engaged for the voyage were Americans, and could speak nothing but English. One of Montriveau's companions took them all ashore to the chief inn of the little town, where he kept them at a degree of drunkenness which deprived them of the free use of their tongues. He himself dropped hints that the brig was chartered to search for lost treasure, — an employment followed in the United States by a body of men who made it a superstition, and whose exploits had been related by the writers of that country. All this explained the appearance of the brig so near the breakers. The passengers and ship's company were searching, said the pretended boatswain, for the wreck of a galleon, lost in 1788, with treasure brought from Mexico. The innkeepers and the authorities inquired no further.

Armand and the devoted friends who were helping him in his enterprise had seen at once that neither force nor fraud could help them to carry off the duchess by the town approach to the convent. They resolved, with the natural audacity that characterized them, to take the bull by the horns, and construct a path to the convent over the perpendicular rocks which to all other eyes were inaccessible: to vanquish nature as General Lamarque had vanquished it at the assault on the island of Capri. In the present instance the sheer precipice offered less foot-hold than the cliffs of Capri had afforded to Montriveau, who had taken a leading part in that

amazing expedition, and to whom the nuns were far more formidable antagonists than Sir Hudson Lowe. To carry off the duchess with noise or disturbance of any kind would have seemed disgraceful to these men. If forced to open action they might as well, to their minds, lay siege to the town and the convent, and leave no witness alive to tell the tale, after the manner of pirates. For them the enterprise had but two aspects: either some great conflagration and feat of arms with which all Europe might resound, and yet remain forever ignorant of its cause; or else a mysterious, silent, aërial abduction which the nuns should lay to the devil himself in the belief that he had paid them a visit. This last plan carried the day in the final council held before leaving Paris. All preparations being made for the sure success of their enterprise, these daring men, surfeited with the tame pleasures of society, looked forward to the event with eager enjoyment.

A species of canoe, made at Marseilles with the utmost care from a Malay model, enabled them to creep up among the reefs to a point where navigation became absolutely impossible. Two cables of iron wire, stretched parallel for a distance of some feet on an inward incline, and along which they slipped baskets, also made of iron wire, served them for a bridge over which, as in China, they could pass from rock to rock. The reefs were thus connected together by a series of cables and baskets, which looked like the webs that a certain species of spider weaves from branch to branch of a tree, — a work of natural instinct, which the Chinese, born imitators, were the first, historically speaking, to copy. Neither the surging of the sea nor the capricious

dash of the waves could affect these frail constructions. The cables had elasticity and play enough to sway to the violence of the water at a curvature long studied by an engineer, the late Cachin, the immortal maker of the port of Cherbourg, who discovered the scientific line which limits the power of the angry waves; a curve settled by a law won from the secrets of nature by the genius of observation, — which is, we may say, wellnigh the whole of the genius of mankind.

Montriveau and his companions were alone upon the rocks. No eye of man could reach them: the best glass, levelled from the deck of the nearest passing vessel could not have shown the fine threads of the iron cords stretched among the reefs, nor the men themselves hidden by the rocks. After eleven days' toil these thirteen human demons of will and energy reached the foot of the projecting rock, which rose perpendicularly forty feet above the level of the sea, — a cliff as difficult for men to climb as the smooth sides of a glass or porcelain jar to a mouse. This solid mass of granite was fortunately cracked. A fissure, whose edges were two straight lines, allowed them to drive in, at the distance of a foot apart, stout wooden wedges, upon which these bold workmen fastened iron props. These props, made for the purpose, were finished at one end with perforated iron plates, into which they could slip steps made of thin fir plank, which also fitted into notches made in a mast, the exact height of the rock-face, and of which the base was securely fastened to the granite ledge below. With an art worthy of these men of action, one of them, a profound mathematician, had calculated the angle at which each step should be graduated from the

top to the bottom of the mast, so as to bring at its exact middle the point from which the steps of the upper half should widen, like a fan, till they reached the top of the rock; while the steps of the lower half widened in like manner, only in a reverse direction, to the lower end of the mast. This staircase, of incredible lightness yet perfectly firm, cost twenty-two days' work. A phosphorus match and the ebb of a tide would be enough to obliterate all traces of it. Thus no revelation was possible, and no search for the violators of the convent could be successful.

At the summit of the great precipice was a rocky platform surrounded on three sides by the sheer cliff. The thirteen unnamed comrades, examining this resting-place with their telescopes by the light of the moon, were satisfied that from this point, in spite of some difficulties, they could easily reach the gardens of the convent where the trees were sufficiently thick to shelter them from sight among the branches. There they could doubtless come to an ultimate decision as to the best means of seizing the nun. After all their patient efforts they were unwilling to compromise the success of their enterprise by running any risk of discovery; and it was therefore determined that they should wait till after the last quarter of the moon before making the final attempt.

Montriveau remained during the last two nights alone on the granite platform, wrapped in his cloak, and lying on the rock. The evening and the morning chants wafted by the breeze filled him with inexpressible delight. He went to the foot of the convent wall, trying to hear the notes of the organ or distinguish from the volume of sound one precious voice. But in spite of the silence

around him the distance was too great for any but the confused sounds of the music to reach his ear, — mellow harmonies in which all defects of execution were lost, and from which the pure thought of art came forth and filled the hearer's soul, needing no efforts of attention nor the weariness and strain of listening. Terrible yet tender memories for Armand, whose love blossomed afresh as in its spring-time through the soft breezes of this music, from which his fancy caught aerial promises of coming happiness.

On the morning of the last night, he came down from the rock at dawn, having spent many hours with his eyes fixed on the unbarred window of a cell looking seaward: bars were not needed to the cells that hung above this vast abyss. A light had shone from this window throughout the night. An instinct of the heart, which misleads as often as it guides, cried to him, "She is there!"

"She is there! to-morrow she will be mine!" he cried, mingling his joyous thought with the solemn tones of the convent bell rung slowly. Strange capriciousness of heart! He loved with more of passion the nun, worn out with the griefs of love, wasted by tears and prayers and fasts and vigils, the woman of twenty-nine who had passed through many sorrows, than he had loved the gay young girl, the sylph, the woman of his first adoration. But men of vigorous soul are drawn by their own nature to love the sublime expressions that noble grief or the impetuous flow of thought imprint upon the face of a woman. The beauty of her sorrow is the most attaching of all loveliness to a man who feels within his heart an inexhaustible treasure of

consolation for one so tender in weakness, so strong through feeling. The beauty of color, of freshness, of smoothness, — the *pretty,* in short, is a commonplace charm which attracts the common run of men. Montriveau was made to adore a face where love could shine amid the lines of grief and the blight of melancholy. Such a lover brings to life at the voice of his all-powerful desires a new being, throbbing with fresh youth, breaking forth for him alone from the worn shell so beautiful to his eyes yet broken and defaced to the eyes of others. He possesses two women, — one who seems to the world pale, discolored, sad; and that other woman within his heart whom no eye sees, an angel comprehending the life of the soul, beaming in all her glory amid the solemnities of love.

Before quitting his post of vigil the general heard faint harmonies floating from the window of the lighted cell; soft voices filled with tender pathos. When he descended to his friends stationed at the base of the rock, he told them — in a few words ringing with that deep, restrained communication of feeling, whose imposing expression men respect and comprehend — that never in his life had he drunk in such infinite felicity.

That evening, in the shadow of thick darkness, eleven devoted comrades hoisted themselves up the precipice, each carrying his poniard, a supply of chocolate, and all the tools necessary to burglars. They scaled the walls of the cloister by means of ladders, manufactured and brought up for that purpose, and then found themselves in the cemetery of the convent. Montriveau recognized the long vaulted gallery he had formerly passed through on his way to the convent parlor; also

the windows of that room. His plan was at once formed and adopted. To enter the parlor by the window which opened into the part where the nuns had stood behind the grating; to follow the corridor which led out of it; to read the names inscribed on the lintels of the doors; to find the cell of Sister Theresa; to surprise and gag her while sleeping; to bind and carry her away, — all this part of the work was an easy matter for men who joined the habits and ways of the world to the audacity and expertness of galley-slaves, and who were calmly indifferent should necessity require the thrust of a weapon to secure silence.

The bars of the window were sawn through in two hours. Three men remained as sentries without; two more watched in the parlor; the rest, with bare feet, stationed themselves from point to point along the corridors; while Montriveau advanced, hidden behind a young man, the most dexterous of them all, Henri de Marsay, who as a matter of precaution was dressed in the habit of the Carmelites, precisely like that worn in this convent. The clock struck three as Montriveau and the false nun reached the dormitories. They soon made out the position of the cells. Hearing no noise, they advanced cautiously, reading by the light of a dark lantern the names fortunately engraved on the doors, together with the mystical devices and portraits of saints which each nun on entering the convent inscribed, like an epigraph, upon the new tale of her life, and in which she often revealed the last thought of her past.

When they reached the cell of Sister Theresa, Montriveau read this inscription: *Sub invocatione Sanctæ*

Theresæ. The motto was: *Adoremus in æternum.* Suddenly his companion laid a hand upon his shoulder and showed him a bright light shining upon the flagstones of the corridor through the chinks of the cell door. At this moment Monsieur de Ronquerolles joined them.

"The nuns are in the church chanting the Office of the Dead," he said.

"I remain here," replied Montriveau; "fall back, all of you, to the parlor, and close the door of this corridor."

He entered quickly, preceded by the pretended nun, who put aside his veil. They then saw in the antechamber to an inner cell the dead body of the duchess lying on the floor upon a plank of her bed, and lighted by two wax tapers. Montriveau and de Marsay said no word, uttered no cry; but they looked at each other. Then the general made a sign which meant, "We will carry her away."

"Escape!" cried Ronquerolles, suddenly entering. "The procession of nuns is returning; you will be seen."

With the magical rapidity which a passionate desire infuses into movement, the body of the duchess was carried to the parlor, passed through the window, and conveyed to the foot of the wall as the abbess followed by the nuns reached the cell to take the body of Sister Theresa to the chapel. The nun whose duty it was to watch with the dead had unscrupulously entered the inner cell to search for the secrets of its occupant. She was so intent upon this purpose that she heard nothing, and was thunderstruck when she came out into the

antechamber and found the body gone. Before the astonished women thought of making any search, the duchess had been lowered by ropes to the foot of the precipice, and the companions of Montriveau had destroyed their work. At nine o'clock in the morning no trace remained of the stairway or the wire bridges. The body of Sister Theresa was on board the brig, which came into port to embark her men and disappeared during the forenoon.

Montriveau remained in his cabin alone with Antoinette de Navarreins, whose countenance shone mercifully upon him, resplendent with the sublime beauty which the calm of death bestows at times upon our mortal remains.

"Come," said Ronquerolles to Montriveau when he reappeared on deck. "She was a woman; now she is nothing. Let us fasten a cannon-ball to her feet, and consign her to the sea, and think of her only as we think of a book read in our childhood."

"Yes," said Montriveau, "for it is but a poem."

"Ah! that is right," said Ronquerolles. "Have passions if you will; but as for love, we should know where to place it. It is only the last love of a woman that can satisfy the first love of a man."

AN EPISODE UNDER THE TERROR.

[SCENES FROM POLITICAL LIFE.]

AN EPISODE UNDER THE TERROR.

On the 22d of January, 1793, towards eight o'clock in the evening, an old gentlewoman came down the sharp declivity of the Faubourg Saint-Martin, which ends near the church of Saint-Laurent in Paris. Snow had fallen throughout the day, so that footfalls could be scarcely heard. The streets were deserted. The natural fear inspired by such stillness was deepened by the terror to which all France was then a prey.

The old lady had met no one. Her failing sight hindered her from perceiving in the distance a few pedestrians, sparsely scattered like shadows, along the broad road of the faubourg. She was walking bravely through the solitude as if her age were a talisman to guard her from danger; but after passing the Rue des Morts she fancied that she heard the firm, heavy tread of a man coming behind her. The thought seized her mind that she had been listening to it unconsciously for some time. Terrified at the idea of being followed, she tried to walk faster to reach a lighted shop-window, and settle the doubt which thus assailed her. When well beyond the horizontal rays of light thrown across the pavement, she turned abruptly and saw a human form looming through the fog. The indistinct glimpse was enough. She staggered for an instant under the weight of terror, for she no longer doubted that this unknown man had tracked

her, step by step, from her home. The hope of escaping such a spy lent strength to her feeble limbs. Incapable of reasoning, she quickened her steps to a run, as if it were possible to escape a man necessarily more agile than she. After running for a few minutes, she reached the shop of a pastry-cook, entered it, and fell, rather than sat, down on a chair which stood before the counter.

As she lifted the creaking latch of the door, a young woman, who was at work on a piece of embroidery, looked up and recognized through the glass panes the antiquated mantle of purple silk which wrapped the old lady, and hastened to pull open a drawer, as if to take from thence something that she had to give her. The action and the expression of the young woman not only implied a wish to get rid of the stranger, as of some one most unwelcome, but she let fall an exclamation of impatience at finding the drawer empty. Then, without looking at the lady, she came rapidly from behind the counter, and went towards the back-shop to call her husband, who appeared at once.

"Where have you put —— ——?" she asked him, mysteriously, calling his attention to the old lady by a glance, and not concluding her sentence.

Although the pastry-cook could see nothing but the enormous black silk hood circled with purple ribbons which the stranger wore, he disappeared, with a glance at his wife which seemed to say, "Do you suppose I should leave *that* on your counter?"

Surprised at the silence and immobility of her customer the wife came forward, and was seized with a sudden movement of compassion as well as of curiosity

when she looked at her. Though the complexion of the old gentlewoman was naturally livid, like that of a person vowed to secret austerities, it was easy to see that some recent alarm had spread an unusual paleness over her features. Her head-covering was so arranged as to hide the hair, whitened no doubt by age, for the cleanly collar of her dress proved that she wore no powder. The concealment of this natural adornment gave to her countenance a sort of conventual severity; but its features were grave and noble. In former days the habits and manners of people of quality were so different from those of all other classes that it was easy to distinguish persons of noble birth. The young shop-woman felt certain, therefore, that the stranger was a *ci-devant*, and one who had probably belonged to the Court.

"Madame?" she said with involuntary respect, forgetting that the title was proscribed.

The old lady made no answer. Her eyes were fixed on the glass of the shop-window, as if some alarming object were painted upon it.

"What is the matter, *citoyenne?*" asked the master of the establishment re-entering, and drawing the attention of his customer to a little cardboard box covered with blue paper, which he held out to her.

"It is nothing, nothing, my friends," she answered in a gentle voice, as she raised her eyes to give the man a thankful look. Seeing a phrygian cap upon his head, a cry escaped her: "Ah! it is you who have betrayed me!"

The young woman and her husband replied by a deprecating gesture of horror which caused the unknown

lady to blush, either for her harsh suspicion or from the relief of feeling it unjust.

"Excuse me," she said with childlike sweetness. Then taking a gold *louis* from her pocket she offered it to the pastry-cook. "Here is the sum we agreed upon," she added.

There is a poverty which poor people quickly divine. The shopkeeper and his wife looked at each other with a glance at the old lady that conveyed a mutual thought. The *louis* was doubtless her last. The hands of the poor woman trembled as she offered it, and her eyes rested upon it sadly, yet not with avarice. She seemed to feel the full extent of her sacrifice. Hunger and want were traced upon her features in lines as legible as those of timidity and ascetic habits. Her clothing showed vestiges of luxury. It was of silk, well-worn; the mantle was clean, though faded; the laces carefully darned; in short, here were the rags of opulence. The two shopkeepers, divided between pity and self-interest, began to soothe their conscience with words: —

"*Citoyenne*, you seem very feeble —"

"Would Madame like to take something?" asked the wife, cutting short her husband's speech.

"We have some very good broth," he added.

"It is so cold, perhaps Madame is chilled by her walk; but you can rest here and warm yourself."

"The devil is not so black as he is painted," cried the husband.

Won by the kind tone of these words, the old lady admitted that she had been followed by a man and was afraid of going home alone.

"Is that all?" said the man with the phrygian cap. "Wait for me, *citoyenne*."

He gave the *louis* to his wife. Then, moved by a species of gratitude which slips into the shopkeeping soul when its owner receives an exorbitant price for an article of little value, he went to put on his uniform as a National guard, took his hat, slung on his sabre, and reappeared under arms. But the wife meantime had reflected. Reflection, as often happens in many hearts, had closed the open hand of her benevolence. Uneasy, and alarmed lest her husband should be mixed up in some dangerous affair, she pulled him by the flap of his coat, intending to stop him; but the worthy man, obeying the impulse of charity, promptly offered to escort the poor lady to her home.

"It seems that the man who has given her this fright is prowling outside," said his wife nervously.

"I am afraid he is," said the old lady, with much simplicity.

"Suppose he should be a spy. Perhaps it is a conspiracy. Don't go. Take back the box." These words, whispered in the pastry-cook's ear by the wife of his bosom, chilled the sudden compassion that had warmed him.

"Well, well, I will just say two words to the man and get rid of him," he said, opening the door and hurrying out.

The old gentlewoman, passive as a child and half paralyzed with fear, sat down again. The shopkeeper almost instantly reappeared; but his face, red by nature and still further scorched by the fires of his bakery, had suddenly turned pale, and he was in the grasp of such

terror that his legs shook and his eyes were like those of a drunken man.

"Miserable aristocrat!" he cried, furiously, "do you want to cut off our heads? Go out from here; let me see your heels, and don't dare to come back; don't expect me to supply you with the means of conspiracy!"

So saying, the pastry-cook endeavored to get back the little box which the old lady had already slipped into one of her pockets. Hardly had the bold hands of the shopkeeper touched her clothing, than, preferring to encounter danger with no protection but that of God rather than lose the thing she had come to buy, she recovered the agility of youth, and sprang to the door, through which she disappeared abruptly, leaving the husband and wife amazed and trembling.

As soon as the poor lady found herself alone in the street she began to walk rapidly; but her strength soon gave way, for she once more heard the snow creaking under the footsteps of the spy as he trod heavily upon it. She was obliged to stop short: the man stopped also. She dared not speak to him, nor even look at him; either because of her terror, or from some lack of natural intelligence. Presently she continued her walk slowly; the man measured his step by hers, and kept at the same distance behind her; he seemed to move like her shadow. Nine o'clock struck as the silent couple repassed the church of Saint-Laurent. It is the nature of all souls, even the weakest, to fall back into quietude after moments of violent agitation; for manifold as our feelings may be, our bodily powers are limited. Thus the old lady, receiving no injury from her apparent persecutor, began to think that he might be a secret friend watching

to protect her. She gathered up in her mind the circumstances attending other apparitions of the mysterious stranger as if to find plausible grounds for this consoling opinion, and took pleasure in crediting him with good rather than sinister intentions. Forgetting the terror he had inspired in the pastry-cook, she walked on with a firmer step towards the upper part of the Faubourg Saint-Martin.

At the end of half an hour she reached a house standing close to the junction of the chief street of the faubourg with the street leading out to the Barrière de Pantin. The place is to this day one of the loneliest in Paris. The north wind blowing from Belleville and the Buttes Chaumont whistled among the houses, or rather cottages, scattered through the sparsely inhabited little valley, where the enclosures are fenced with walls built of mud and refuse bones. This dismal region seems the natural home of poverty and despair. The man who was intent on following the poor creature who had had the courage to thread these dark and silent streets seemed struck with the spectacle they offered. He stopped as if reflecting, and stood in a hesitating attitude, dimly visible by a street lantern whose flickering light scarcely pierced the fog. Fear gave eyes to the old gentlewoman, who now fancied that she saw something sinister in the features of this unknown man. All her terrors revived, and profiting by the curious hesitation that had seized him, she glided like a shadow to the doorway of the solitary dwelling, touched a spring, and disappeared with phantasmagoric rapidity.

The man, standing motionless, gazed at the house which was, as it were, a type of the wretched buildings

of the neighborhood. The tottering hovel, built of porous stone in rough blocks, was coated with yellow plaster much cracked, and looked ready to fall before a gust of wind. The roof, of brown tiles covered with moss, had sunk in several places, and gave the impression that the weight of snow might break it down at any moment. Each storey had three windows whose frames, rotted by dampness and shrunken by the heat of the sun, told that the outer cold penetrated to the chambers. The lonely house seemed like an ancient tower that time had forgotten to destroy. A faint light gleamed from the garret windows, which were irregularly cut in the roof; but the rest of the house was in complete obscurity. The old woman went up the rough and clumsy stairs with difficulty, holding fast to a rope which took the place of baluster. She knocked furtively at the door of a lodging under the roof, and sat hastily down on a chair which an old man offered her as she entered.

"Hide! hide yourself!" she cried. "Though we go out so seldom our errands are known, our steps are watched —"

"What has happened?" asked another old woman sitting near the fire.

"The man who has hung about the house since yesterday followed me to-night."

At these words the occupants of the hovel looked at each other with terror in their faces. The old man was the least moved of the three, possibly because he was the one in greatest danger. Under the pressure of misfortune or the yoke of persecution a man of courage begins, as it were, by preparing for the sacrifice of

himself: he looks upon his days as so many victories won from fate. The eyes of the two women, fixed upon the old man, showed plainly that he alone was the object of their extreme anxiety.

"Why distrust God, my sisters?" he said, in a hollow but impressive voice. "We chanted praises to his name amid the cries of victims and assassins at the convent. If it pleased him to save me from that butchery, it was doubtless for some destiny which I shall accept without a murmur. God protects his own, and disposes of them according to his will. It is of you, not of me, that we should think."

"No," said one of the women; "what is our life in comparison with that of a priest?"

"Ever since the day when I found myself outside of the Abbaye des Chelles," said the nun beside the fire, "I have given myself up for dead."

"Here," said the one who had just come in, holding out the little box to the priest, "here are the sacramental wafers — Listen!" she cried, interrupting herself. "I hear some one on the stairs."

At these words all three listened intently. The noise ceased.

"Do not be frightened," said the priest, "even if some one asks to enter. A person on whose fidelity we can safely rely has taken measures to cross the frontier, and he will soon call here for letters which I have written to the Duc de Langeais and the Marquis de Beauséant advising them as to the measures they must take to get you out of this dreadful country and save you from the misery or the death you would otherwise undergo here."

"Shall you not follow us?" said the two nuns softly, but in a tone of despair.

"My place is near the victims," said the priest, simply.

The nuns were silent, looking at him with devout admiration.

"Sister Martha," he said, addressing the nun who had fetched the wafers, "this messenger must answer '*Fiat voluntas*' to the word '*Hosanna*.'"

"There is some one on the stairway," exclaimed the other nun, hastily opening a hiding-place burrowed at the edge of the roof.

This time it was easy to hear the steps of a man sounding through the deep silence on the rough stairs, which were caked with patches of hardened mud. The priest slid with difficulty into a narrow hiding-place, and the nuns hastily threw articles of apparel over him.

"You can shut me in, Sister Agatha," he said, in a smothered voice.

He was scarcely hidden when three knocks upon the door made the sisters tremble and consult each other with their eyes, for they dared not speak. Forty years' separation from the world had made them like plants of a hot-house which wilt when brought into the outer air. Accustomed to the life of a convent, they could not conceive of any other, and when, one morning, their bars and gratings were flung down they had shuddered at finding themselves free. It is easy to imagine the species of imbecility which the events of the Revolution, enacted before their eyes, had produced in these innocent souls. Quite incapable of harmonizing their conventual ideas with the exigencies of ordinary life,

not even comprehending their own situation, they were like children who had always been cared for, and who now, torn from their maternal providence, had taken to prayers as other children take to tears. So it happened that in presence of immediate danger they were dumb and passive, and could think of no other defence than Christian resignation.

The man who sought to enter interpreted their silence as he pleased; he suddenly opened the door and showed himself. The two nuns trembled when they recognized the individual who for some days had watched the house and seemed to make inquiries about its inmates. They stood quite still and looked at him with uneasy curiosity, like the children of savages examining a being of another sphere. The stranger was very tall and stout, but nothing in his manner or appearance denoted that he was a bad man. He copied the immobility of the sisters and stood motionless, letting his eye rove slowly round the room.

Two bundles of straw placed on two planks served as beds for the nuns. A table was in the middle of the room; upon it a copper candlestick, a few plates, three knives, and a round loaf of bread. The fire on the hearth was very low, and a few sticks of wood piled in a corner of the room testified to the poverty of the occupants. The walls, once covered with a coat of paint now much defaced, showed the wretched condition of the roof through which the rain had trickled, making a network of brown stains. A sacred relic, saved no doubt from the pillage of the Abbaye des Chelles, adorned the mantel-shelf of the chimney. Three chairs, two coffers, and a broken chest of drawers

completed the furniture of the room. A doorway cut near the fireplace showed there was probably an inner chamber.

The inventory of this poor cell was soon made by the individual who had presented himself under such alarming auspices. An expression of pity crossed his features, and as he threw a kind glance upon the frightened women he seemed as much embarrassed as they. The strange silence in which they all three stood and faced each other lasted but a moment, for the stranger seemed to guess the moral weakness and inexperience of the poor helpless creatures, and he said, in a voice which he strove to render gentle, —

"I have not come as an enemy, *citoyennes.*" Then he paused, but resumed: "My sisters, if harm should ever happen to you, be sure that I shall not have contributed to it. I have come to ask a favor of you."

They still kept silence.

"If I ask too much — if I annoy you — I will go away; but, believe me, I am heartily devoted to you, and if there is any service that I could render you, you may employ me without fear. I, and I alone, perhaps, am above law — since there is no longer a king."

The ring of truth in these words induced Sister Agatha, a nun belonging to the ducal house of Langeaïs, and whose manners indicated that she had once lived amid the festivities of life and breathed the air of courts, to point to a chair as if she asked their guest to be seated. The unknown gave vent to an expression of joy, mingled with melancholy, as he understood this gesture. He waited respectfully till the sisters were seated, and then obeyed it.

"You have given shelter," he said, "to a venerable priest not sworn in by the Republic, who escaped miraculously from the massacre at the Convent of the Carmelites."

"*Hosanna*," said Sister Agatha, suddenly interrupting the stranger, and looking at him with anxious curiosity.

"That is not his name, I think," he answered.

"But, Monsieur, we have no priest here," cried Sister Martha, hastily, "and —"

"Then you should take better precautions," said the unknown gently, stretching his arm to the table and picking up a breviary. "I do not think you understand Latin and —"

He stopped short, for the extreme distress painted on the faces of the poor nuns made him fear he had gone too far; they trembled violently, and their eyes filled with tears.

"Do not fear," he said; "I know the name of your guest, and yours also. During the last three days I have learned your poverty, and your great devotion to the venerable Abbé of —"

"Hush!" exclaimed Sister Agatha, ingenuously putting a finger on her lip.

"You see, my sisters, that if I had the horrible design of betraying you, I might have accomplished it again and again."

As he uttered these words the priest emerged from his prison and appeared in the middle of the room.

"I cannot believe, Monsieur," he said courteously, "that you are one of our persecutors. I trust you. What is it you desire of me?"

The saintly confidence of the old man and the nobility of mind imprinted on his countenance might have disarmed even an assassin. He who thus mysteriously agitated this home of penury and resignation stood contemplating the group before him; then he addressed the priest in a trustful tone, with these words: —

"My father, I came to ask you to celebrate a Mass for the repose of the soul — of — of a sacred being whose body can never lie in holy ground."

The priest involuntarily shuddered. The nuns, not as yet understanding who it was of whom the unknown man had spoken, stood with their necks stretched and their faces turned towards the speakers, in an attitude of eager curiosity. The ecclesiastic looked intently at the stranger; unequivocal anxiety was marked on every feature, and his eyes offered an earnest and even ardent prayer.

"Yes," said the priest at length. "Return here at midnight and I shall be ready to celebrate the only funeral service that we are able to offer in expiation of the crime of which you speak."

The unknown shivered; a joy both sweet and solemn seemed to rise in his soul above some secret grief. Respectfully saluting the priest and the two saintly women, he disappeared with a mute gratitude which these generous souls knew well how to interpret.

Two hours later the stranger returned, knocked cautiously at the door of the garret, and was admitted by Mademoiselle de Langeais, who led him to the inner chamber of the humble refuge, where all was in readiness for the ceremony. Between two flues of the

chimney the nuns had placed the old chest of drawers, whose broken edges were concealed by a magnificent altar-cloth of green moiré. A large ebony and ivory crucifix hanging on the discolored wall stood out in strong relief from the surrounding bareness, and necessarily caught the eye. Four slender little tapers, which the sisters had contrived to fasten to the altar with sealing-wax, threw a pale glimmer dimly reflected by the yellow wall. These feeble rays scarcely lit up the rest of the chamber, but as their light fell upon the sacred objects it seemed a halo falling from heaven upon the bare and undecorated altar.

The floor was damp. The attic roof, which sloped sharply on both sides of the room, was full of chinks through which the wind penetrated. Nothing could be less stately, yet nothing was ever more solemn than this lugubrious ceremony. Silence so deep that some far-distant cry could have pierced it, lent a sombre majesty to the nocturnal scene. The grandeur of the occasion contrasted vividly with the poverty of its circumstances, and roused a feeling of religious terror. On either side of the altar the old nuns, kneeling on the tiled floor and taking no thought of its mortal dampness, were praying in concert with the priest, who, robed in his pontifical vestments, placed upon the altar a golden chalice incrusted with precious stones, — a sacred vessel rescued, no doubt, from the pillage of the Abbaye des Chelles. Close to this vase, which was a gift of royal munificence, the bread and wine of the consecrated sacrifice were contained in two glass tumblers scarcely worthy of the meanest tavern. In default of a missal the priest had placed his breviary

on a corner of the altar. A common earthenware platter was provided for the washing of those innocent hands, pure and unspotted with blood. All was majestic and yet paltry; poor but noble; profane and holy in one.

The unknown man knelt piously between the sisters. Suddenly, as he caught sight of the crape upon the chalice and the crucifix, — for in default of other means of proclaiming the object of this funeral rite the priest had put God himself into mourning, — the mysterious visitant was seized by some all-powerful recollection, and drops of sweat gathered on his brow. The four silent actors in this scene looked at each other with mysterious sympathy; their souls, acting one upon another, communicated to each the feelings of all, blending them into the one emotion of religious pity. It seemed as though their thought had evoked from the dead the sacred martyr whose body was devoured by quicklime, but whose shade rose up before them in royal majesty. They were celebrating a funeral Mass without the remains of the deceased. Beneath these rafters and disjointed laths four Christian souls were interceding with God for a king of France, and making his burial without a coffin. It was the purest of all devotions; an act of wonderful loyalty accomplished without one thought of self. Doubtless in the eyes of God it was the cup of cold water that weighed in the balance against many virtues. The whole of monarchy was there in the prayers of the priest and the two poor women; but also it may have been that the Revolution was present likewise in the person of the strange being whose face betrayed the remorse that led him to make this solemn offering of a vast repentance.

Instead of pronouncing the Latin words, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, etc., the priest, with divine intuition, glanced at his three assistants, who represented all Christian France, and said, in words which effaced the penury and meanness of the hovel, — "We enter now into the sanctuary of God."

At these words, uttered with penetrating unction, a solemn awe seized the participants. Beneath the dome of Saint Peter's in Rome God had never seemed more majestic to man than he did now in this refuge of poverty and to the eyes of these Christians, — so true is it that between man and God all mediation is unneeded, for his glory descends from Himself alone. The fervent piety of the nameless man was unfeigned, and the feeling that held these four servants of God and the king was unanimous. The sacred words echoed like celestial music amid the silence. There was a moment when the unknown broke down and wept: it was at the *Pater Noster*, to which the priest added a Latin clause which the stranger doubtless comprehended and applied, — *Et remitte scelus regicidis sicut Ludovicus eis remisit semetipse* ("And forgive the regicides even as Louis XVI. himself forgave them"). The two nuns saw the tears coursing down the manly cheeks of their visitant, and dropping fast on the tiled floor.

The Office of the Dead was recited. The *Domine salvum fac regem*, sung in low tones, touched the hearts of these faithful royalists as they thought of the infant king, now captive in the hands of his enemies, for whom this prayer was offered. The unknown shuddered; perhaps he feared an impending crime in which he would be called to take an unwilling part.

When the service was over, the priest made a sign to the nuns, who withdrew to the outer room. As soon as he was alone with the unknown, the old man went up to him with gentle sadness of manner, and said in the tone of a father, —

"My son, if you have steeped your hands in the blood of the martyr king confess yourself to me. There is no crime which, in the eyes of God, is not washed out by a repentance as deep and sincere as yours appears to be."

At the first words of the ecclesiastic an involuntary motion of terror escaped the stranger; but he quickly recovered himself, and looked at the astonished priest with calm assurance.

"My father," he said, in a voice that nevertheless trembled, "no one is more innocent than I of the blood shed — "

"I believe it!" said the priest.

He paused a moment, during which he examined afresh his penitent; then, persisting in the belief that he was one of those timid members of the Assembly who sacrificed the inviolate and sacred head to save their own, he resumed in a grave voice: —

"Reflect, my son, that something more than taking no part in that great crime is needed to absolve from guilt. Those who kept their sword in the scabbard when they might have defended their king have a heavy account to render to the King of kings. Oh, yes," added the venerable man, moving his head from right to left with an expressive motion; "yes, heavy, indeed! for, standing idle, they made themselves the accomplices of a horrible transgression."

"Do you believe," asked the stranger, in a surprised tone, "that even an indirect participation will be punished? The soldier ordered to form the line, — do you think that he was guilty?"

The priest hesitated. Glad of the dilemma that placed this puritan of royalty between the dogma of passive obedience, which according to the partisans of monarchy should dominate the military system, and the other dogma, equally imperative, which consecrates the person of the king, the stranger hastened to accept the hesitation of the priest as a solution of the doubts that seemed to trouble him. Then, so as not to allow the old Jansenist time for further reflection, he said quickly, —

"I should blush to offer you any fee whatever in acknowledgment of the funeral service you have just celebrated for the repose of the king's soul and for the discharge of my conscience. We can only pay for inestimable things by offerings which are likewise beyond all price. Deign to accept, Monsieur, the gift which I now make to you of a holy relic; the day may come when you will know its value."

As he said these words he gave the ecclesiastic a little box of light weight. The priest took it as it were involuntarily, for the solemn tone in which the words were uttered and the awe with which the stranger held the box struck him with fresh amazement. They re-entered the outer room, where the two nuns were waiting for them.

"You are living," said the unknown, "in a house whose owner, Mucius Scævola, the plasterer who lives on the first floor, is noted in the Section for his patriotism. He is, however, secretly attached to the Bourbons. He was formerly huntsman to Monseigneur the

Prince de Conti, to whom he owes everything. As long as you stay in this house you are in greater safety than you can be in any other part of France. Remain here. Pious souls will watch over you and supply your wants; and you can await without danger the coming of better days. A year hence, on the 21st of January" (as he uttered these last words he could not repress an involuntary shudder), "I shall return to celebrate once more the Mass of expiation —"

He could not end the sentence. Bowing to the silent occupants of the garret, he cast a last look upon the signs of their poverty and disappeared.

To the two simple-minded women this event had all the interest of romance. As soon as the venerable abbé told them of the mysterious gift so solemnly offered by the stranger they placed the box upon the table, and the three anxious faces, faintly lighted by a tallow-candle, betrayed an indescribable curiosity. Mademoiselle de Langeais opened the box and took from it a handkerchief of extreme fineness, stained with sweat. As she unfolded it they saw dark stains.

"That is blood!" exclaimed the priest.

"It is marked with the royal crown!" cried the other nun.

The sisters let fall the precious relic with gestures of horror. To these ingenuous souls the mystery that wrapped their unknown visitor became inexplicable, and the priest from that day forth forbade himself to search for its solution.

The three prisoners soon perceived that, in spite of the Terror, a powerful arm was stretched over them.

First, they received firewood and provisions; next, the sisters guessed that a woman was associated with their protector, for linen and clothing came to them mysteriously, and enabled them to go out without danger of observation from the aristocratic fashion of the only garments they had been able to secure; finally, Mucius Scævola brought them certificates of citizenship. Advice as to the necessary means of insuring the safety of the venerable priest often came to them from unexpected quarters, and proved so singularly opportune that it was quite evident it could only have been given by some one in possession of state secrets. In spite of the famine which then afflicted Paris, they found daily at the door of their hovel rations of white bread, laid there by invisible hands. They thought they recognized in Mucius Scævola the agent of these mysterious benefactions, which were always timely and intelligent; but the noble occupants of the poor garret had no doubt whatever that the unknown individual who had celebrated the midnight Mass on the 22d of January, 1793, was their secret protector. They added to their daily prayers a special prayer for him; night and day these pious hearts made supplication for his happiness, his prosperity, his redemption. They prayed that God would keep his feet from snares and save him from his enemies, and grant him a long and peaceful life.

Their gratitude, renewed as it were daily, was necessarily mingled with curiosity that grew keener day by day. The circumstances attending the appearance of the stranger were a ceaseless topic of conversation and of endless conjecture, and soon became a benefit of a special kind, from the occupation and distraction of

mind which was thus produced. They resolved that the stranger should not be allowed to escape the expression of their gratitude when he came to commemorate the next sad anniversary of the death of Louis XVI.

That night, so impatiently awaited, came at length. At midnight the heavy steps resounded up the wooden stairway. The room was prepared for the service; the altar was dressed. This time the sisters opened the door and hastened to light the entrance. Mademoiselle de Langeais even went down a few stairs that she might catch the first glimpse of their benefactor.

"Come!" she said, in a trembling and affectionate voice. "Come, you are expected!"

The man raised his head, gave the nun a gloomy look, and made no answer. She felt as though an icy garment had fallen upon her, and she kept silence. At his aspect gratitude and curiosity died within their hearts. He may have been less cold, less taciturn, less terrible than he seemed to these poor souls, whose own emotions led them to expect a flow of friendship from his. They saw that this mysterious being was resolved to remain a stranger to them, and they acquiesced with resignation. But the priest fancied he saw a smile, quickly repressed, upon the stranger's lip as he saw the preparations made to receive him. He heard the Mass and prayed, but immediately disappeared, refusing in a few courteous words the invitation given by Mademoiselle de Langeais to remain and partake of the humble collation they had prepared for him.

After the 9th Thermidor the nuns and the Abbé de Marolles were able to go about Paris without incurring

any danger. The first visit of the old priest was to a perfumery at the sign of the "Queen of Flowers," kept by the citizen and *citoyenne* Ragon, formerly perfumers to the Court, well known for their faithfulness to the royal family, and employed by the Vendéens as a channel of communication with the princes and royal committees in Paris. The abbé, dressed as the times required, was leaving the doorstep of the shop, situated between the church of Saint-Roch and the Rue des Fondeurs, when a great crowd coming down the Rue Saint-Honoré hindered him from advancing.

"What is it?" he asked of Madame Ragon.

"Oh, nothing!" she answered. "It is the cart and the executioner going to the Place Louis XV. Ah, we saw enough of that last year! but now, four days after the anniversary of the 21st of January, we can look at the horrid procession without distress."

"Why so?" asked the abbé. "What you say is not Christian."

"But this is the execution of the accomplices of Robespierre. They have fought it off as long as they could, but now they are going in their turn where they have sent so many innocent people."

The crowd which filled the Rue Saint-Honoré passed on like a wave. Above the sea of heads the Abbé de Marolles, yielding to an impulse, saw, standing erect in the cart, the stranger who three days before had assisted for the second time in the Mass of commemoration.

"Who is that?" he asked; "the one standing —"

"That is the executioner," answered Monsieur Ragon, calling the man by his monarchical name.

"Help! help!" cried Madame Ragon. "Monsieur l'Abbé is fainting!"

She caught up a flask of vinegar and brought him quickly back to consciousness.

"He must have given me," said the old priest, "the handkerchief with which the king wiped his brow as he went to his martyrdom. Poor man! that steel knife had a heart when all France had none!"

The perfumers thought the words of the priest were an effect of delirium.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS GAUDISSART.

[SCENES FROM PROVINCIAL LIFE.]

THE ILLUSTRIOUS GAUDISSART.

I.

The commercial traveller, a personage unknown to antiquity, is one of the striking figures created by the manners and customs of our present epoch. May he not, in some conceivable order of things, be destined to mark for coming philosophers the great transition which welds a period of material enterprise to the period of intellectual strength? Our century will bind the realm of isolated power, abounding as it does in creative genius, to the realm of universal but levelling might; equalizing all products, spreading them broadcast among the masses, and being itself controlled by the principle of unity, — the final expression of all societies. Do we not find the dead level of barbarism succeeding the saturnalia of popular thought and the last struggles of those civilizations which accumulated the treasures of the world in one direction?

The commercial traveller! Is he not to the realm of ideas what our stage-coaches are to men and things? He is their vehicle; he sets them going, carries them along, rubs them up with one another. He takes from the luminous centre a handful of light, and scatters it broadcast among the drowsy populations of the duller regions. This human pyrotechnic is a scholar without learning, a juggler hoaxed by himself, an unbelieving priest of mysteries and dogmas, which he expounds all

the better for his want of faith. Curious being! He has seen everything, known everything, and is up in all the ways of the world. Soaked in the vices of Paris, he affects to be the fellow-well-met of the provinces. He is the link which connects the village with the capital; though essentially he is neither Parisian nor provincial, — he is a traveller. He sees nothing to the core: men and places he knows by their names; as for things, he looks merely at their surface, and he has his own little tape-line with which to measure them. His glance shoots over all things and penetrates none. He occupies himself with a great deal, yet nothing occupies him.

Jester and jolly fellow, he keeps on good terms with all political opinions, and is patriotic to the bottom of his soul. A capital mimic, he knows how to put on, turn and turn about, the smiles of persuasion, satisfaction, and good-nature, or drop them for the normal expression of his natural man. He is compelled to be an observer of a certain sort in the interests of his trade. He must probe men with a glance and guess their habits, wants, and above all their solvency. To economize time he must come to quick decisions as to his chances of success, — a practice that makes him more or less a man of judgment; on the strength of which he sets up as a judge of theatres, and discourses about those of Paris and the provinces.

He knows all the good and bad haunts in France, *de actu et visu.* He can pilot you, on occasion, to vice or virtue with equal assurance. Blest with the eloquence of a hot-water spigot turned on at will, he can check or let run, without floundering, the collection of phrases

which he keeps on tap, and which produce upon his victims the effect of a moral shower-bath. Loquacious as a cricket, he smokes, drinks, wears a profusion of trinkets, overawes the common people, passes for a lord in the villages, and never permits himself to be "stumped," — a slang expression all his own. He knows how to slap his pockets at the right time, and make his money jingle if he thinks the servants of the second-class houses which he wants to enter (always eminently suspicious) are likely to take him for a thief. Activity is not the least surprising quality of this human machine. Not the hawk swooping upon its prey, not the stag doubling before the huntsman and the hounds, nor the hounds themselves catching scent of the game, can be compared with him for the rapidity of his dart when he spies a "commission," for the agility with which he trips up a rival and gets ahead of him, for the keenness of his scent as he noses a customer and discovers the spot where he can get off his wares.

How many great qualities must such a man possess! You will find in all countries many such diplomats of low degree; consummate negotiators arguing in the interests of calico, jewels, frippery, wines; and often displaying more true diplomacy than ambassadors themselves, who, for the most part, know only the forms of it. No one in France can doubt the powers of the commercial traveller; that intrepid soul who dares all, and boldly brings the genius of civilization and the modern inventions of Paris into a struggle with the plain commonsense of remote villages, and the ignorant and boorish treadmill of provincial ways. Can we ever forget the

skilful manœuvres by which he worms himself into the minds of the populace, bringing a volume of words to bear upon the refractory, reminding us of the indefatigable worker in marbles whose file eats slowly into a block of porphyry? Would you seek to know the utmost power of language, or the strongest pressure that a phrase can bring to bear against rebellious lucre, against the miserly proprietor squatting in the recesses of his country lair? — listen to one of these great ambassadors of Parisian industry as he revolves and works and sucks like an intelligent piston of the steam-engine called Speculation.

"Monsieur," said a wise political economist, the director-cashier-manager and secretary-general of a celebrated fire-insurance company, "out of every five hundred thousand francs of policies to be renewed in the provinces, not more than fifty thousand are paid up voluntarily. The other four hundred and fifty thousand are got in by the activity of our agents, who go about among those who are in arrears and worry them with stories of horrible incendiaries until they are driven to sign the new policies. Thus you see that eloquence, the labial flux, is nine tenths of the ways and means of our business."

To talk, to make people listen to you, — that is seduction in itself. A nation that has two Chambers, a woman who lends both ears, are soon lost. Eve and her serpent are the everlasting myth of an hourly fact which began, and may end, with the world itself.

"A conversation of two hours ought to capture your man," said a retired lawyer.

Let us walk round the commercial traveller, and look

at him well. Don't forget his overcoat, olive green, nor his cloak with its morocco collar, nor the striped blue cotton shirt. In this queer figure — so original that we cannot rub it out — how many divers personalities we come across! In the first place, what an acrobat, what a circus, what a battery, all in one, is the man himself, his vocation, and his tongue! Intrepid mariner, he plunges in, armed with a few phrases, to catch five or six hundred thousand francs in the frozen seas, in the domain of the red Indians who inhabit the interior of France. The provincial fish will not rise to harpoons and torches; it can only be taken with seines and nets and gentlest persuasions. The traveller's business is to extract the gold in country *caches* by a purely intellectual operation, and to extract it pleasantly and without pain. Can you think without a shudder of the flood of phrases which, day by day, renewed each dawn, leaps in cascades the length and breadth of sunny France?

You know the species; let us now take a look at the individual.

There lives in Paris an incomparable commercial traveller, the paragon of his race, a man who possesses in the highest degree all the qualifications necessary to the nature of his success. His speech is vitriol and likewise glue, — glue to catch and entangle his victim and make him sticky and easy to grip; vitriol to dissolve hard heads, close fists, and closer calculations. His line was once the *hat;* but his talents and the art with which he snared the wariest provincial had brought him such commercial celebrity that all

vendors of the "*article Paris*" paid court to him, and humbly begged that he would deign to undertake their commissions.[1]

Thus, when he returned to Paris in the intervals of his triumphal progress through France, he lived a life of perpetual festivity in the shape of weddings and suppers. When he was in the provinces, the correspondents in the smaller towns made much of him: in Paris, the great houses fêted and caressed him. Welcomed, flattered, and fed wherever he went, it came to pass that to breakfast or to dine alone was a novelty, an event. He lived the life of a sovereign, or, better still, of a journalist; in fact, he was the perambulating *feuilleton* of Parisian commerce.

His name was Gaudissart; and his renown, his vogue, the flatteries showered upon him, were such as to win for him the surname of Illustrious. Wherever the fellow went, — behind a counter or before a bar, into a *salon* or to the top of a stage-coach, up to a garret or to dine with a banker, — every one said, the moment they saw him, "Ah! here comes the illustrious Gaudissart!"[2] No name was ever so in keeping with the style, the manners, the countenance, the voice, the language, of any man. [All things smiled upon our traveller, and the traveller smiled back in return. *Similia similibus*, — he believed in homœopathy. Puns, horse-

[1] *Article Paris*, means anything — especially articles of wearing apparel — which originates or is made in Paris. The name is supposed to give to the thing a special value in the provinces.

[2] *Se gaudir*, to enjoy, to make fun. *Gaudriole*, gay discourse, rather free. — LITTRÉ.

laugh, monkish face, skin of a friar, true Rabelaisian exterior, clothing, body, mind, and features, all pulled together to put a devil-may-care jollity into every inch of his person. Free-handed and easy-going, he might be recognized at once as the favorite of *grisettes*, the man who jumps lightly to the top of a stage-coach, gives a hand to the timid lady who fears to step down, jokes with the postillion about his neckerchief and contrives to sell him a cap, smiles at the maid and catches her round the waist or by the heart; gurgles at dinner like a bottle of wine and pretends to draw the cork by sounding a fillip on his distended cheek; plays a tune with his knife on the champagne glasses without breaking them, and says to the company, "Let me see you do *that;*" chaffs the timid traveller, contradicts the knowing one, lords it over a dinner-table and manages to get the titbits for himself. A strong fellow, nevertheless, he can throw aside all this nonsense and mean business when he flings away the stump of his cigar and says, with a glance at some town, "I 'll go and see what those people have got in their stomachs."

When buckled down to his work he became the slyest and cleverest of diplomats. All things to all men, he knew how to accost a banker like a capitalist, a magistrate like a functionary, a royalist with pious and monarchical sentiments, a *bourgeois* as one of themselves. In short, wherever he was he was just what he ought to be; he left Gaudissart at the door when he went in, and picked him up when he came out.

Until 1830 the illustrious Gaudissart was faithful to the *article Paris*. In his close relation to the caprices of humanity, the varied paths of commerce had enabled

him to observe the windings of the heart of man. He had learned the secret of persuasive eloquence, the knack of loosening the tightest purse-strings, the art of rousing desire in the souls of husbands, wives, children, and servants; and what is more, he knew how to satisfy it. No one had greater faculty than he for inveigling a merchant by the charms of a bargain, and disappearing at the instant when desire had reached its crisis. Full of gratitude to the hat-making trade, he always declared that it was his efforts in behalf of the exterior of the human head which had enabled him to understand its interior: he had capped and crowned so many people, he was always flinging himself at their heads, etc. His jokes about hats and heads were irrepressible, though perhaps not dazzling.

Nevertheless, after August and October, 1830, he abandoned the hat trade and the *article Paris*, and tore himself from things mechanical and visible to mount into the higher spheres of Parisian speculation. "He forsook," to use his own words, "matter for mind; manufactured products for the infinitely purer elaborations of human intelligence." This requires some explanation.

The general upset of 1830 brought to birth, as everybody knows, a number of old ideas which clever speculators tried to pass off in new bodies. After 1830 ideas became property. A writer, too wise to publish his writings, once remarked that "more ideas are stolen than pocket-handkerchiefs." Perhaps in course of time we may have an Exchange for thought; in fact, even now ideas, good or bad, have their consols, are bought up, imported, exported, sold, and quoted like stocks.

If ideas are not on hand ready for sale, speculators try to pass off words in their stead, and actually live upon them as a bird lives on the seeds of his millet. Pray do not laugh; a word is worth quite as much as an idea in a land where the ticket on a sack is of more importance than the contents. Have we not seen libraries working off the word *picturesque* when literature would have cut the throat of the word *fantastic?* Fiscal genius has guessed the proper tax on intellect; it has accurately estimated the profits of advertising; it has registered a prospectus of the quantity and exact value of the property, weighing its thought at the intellectual Stamp Office in the Rue de la Paix.

Having become an article of commerce, intellect and all its products must naturally obey the laws which bind other manufacturing interests. Thus it often happens that ideas, conceived in their cups by certain apparently idle Parisians, — who nevertheless fight many a moral battle over their champagne and their pheasants, — are handed down at their birth from the brain to commercial travellers who are employed to spread them discreetly, *urbi et orbi*, through Paris and the provinces, seasoned with the fried pork of advertisement and prospectus, by means of which they catch in their rat-trap the departmental rodent commonly called subscriber, sometimes stockholder, occasionally corresponding member or patron, but invariably fool.

"I am a fool!" many a poor country proprietor has said when, caught by the prospect of being the first to launch a new idea, he finds that he has, in point of fact, launched his thousand or twelve hundred francs into a gulf.

"Subscribers are fools who never can be brought to understand that to go ahead in the intellectual world they must start with more money than they need for the tour of Europe," say the speculators.

Consequently there is endless warfare between the recalcitrant public which refuses to pay the Parisian imposts and the tax-gatherer who, living by his receipt of custom, lards the public with new ideas, turns it on the spit of lively projects, roasts it with prospectuses (basting all the while with flattery), and finally gobbles it up with some toothsome sauce in which it is caught and intoxicated like a fly with black-lead. Moreover, since 1830 what honors and emoluments have been scattered throughout France to stimulate the zeal and self-love of the "progressive and intelligent masses"! Titles, medals, diplomas, a sort of legion of honor invented for the army of martyrs, have followed each other with marvellous rapidity. Speculators in the manufactured products of th intellect have developed a spice, a ginger, all their own. From this have come premiums, forestalled dividends, and that conscription of noted names which is levied without the knowledge of the unfortunate writers who bear them, and who thus find themselves actual co-operators in more enterprises than there are days in the year; for the law, we may remark, takes no account of the theft of a patronymic. Worse than all is the rape of ideas which these caterers for the public mind, like the slave-merchants of Asia, tear from the paternal brain before they are well matured, and drag half-clothed before the eyes of their blockhead of a sultan, their Shahabaham, their terrible public, which, if they don't amuse it, will cut off

their heads by curtailing the ingots and emptying their pockets.

This madness of our epoch reacted upon the illustrious Gaudissart, and here follows the history of how it happened. A life-insurance company having been told of his irresistible eloquence offered him an unheard-of commission, which he graciously accepted. The bargain concluded and the treaty signed, our traveller was put in training, or we might say weaned, by the secretary-general of the enterprise, who freed his mind of its swaddling-clothes, showed him the dark holes of the business, taught him its dialect, took the mechanism apart bit by bit, dissected for his instruction the particular public he was expected to gull, crammed him with phrases, fed him with impromptu replies, provisioned him with unanswerable arguments, and, so to speak, sharpened the file of the tongue which was about to operate upon the life of France.

The puppet amply rewarded the pains bestowed upon him. The heads of the company boasted of the illustrious Gaudissart, showed him such attention and proclaimed the great talents of this perambulating prospectus so loudly in the sphere of exalted banking and commercial diplomacy, that the financial managers of two newspapers (celebrated at that time but since defunct) were seized with the idea of employing him to get subscribers. The proprietors of the "Globe," an organ of Saint-Simonism, and the "Movement," a republican journal, each invited the illustrious Gaudissart to a conference, and proposed to give him ten francs a head for every subscriber, provided he brought in a thousand, but only five francs if he got no more

than five hundred. The cause of political journalism not interfering with the pre-accepted cause of life insurance, the bargain was struck; although Gaudissart demanded an indemnity from the Saint-Simonians for the eight days he was forced to spend in studying the doctrines of their apostle, asserting that a prodigious effort of memory and intellect was necessary to get to the bottom of that "*article*" and to reason upon it suitably. He asked nothing, however, from the republicans. In the first place, he inclined to republican ideas, — the only ones, according to gaudissardian philosophy, which could bring about a rational equality. Besides which he had already dipped into the conspiracies of the French *carbonari;* he had been arrested, and released for want of proof; and finally, as he called the newspaper proprietors to observe, he had lately grown a mustache, and needed only a hat of a certain shape and a pair of spurs to represent, with due propriety, the Republic.

II.

For one whole week this commanding genius went every morning to be Saint-Simonized at the office of the "Globe," and every afternoon he betook himself to the life-insurance company, where he learned the intricacies of financial diplomacy. His aptitude and his memory were prodigious; so that he was able to start on his peregrinations by the 15th of April, the date at which he usually opened the spring campaign. Two large commercial houses, alarmed at the decline of business, implored the ambitious Gaudissart not to desert the *article Paris*, and seduced him, it was said, with large offers, to take their commissions once more. The king of travellers was amenable to the claims of his old friends, enforced as they were by the enormous premiums offered to him.

"Listen, my little Jenny," he said in a hackney-coach to a pretty florist.

All truly great men delight in allowing themselves to be tyrannized over by a feeble being, and Gaudissart had found his tyrant in Jenny. He was bringing her home at eleven o'clock from the Gymnase, whither he had taken her, in full dress, to a proscenium box on the first tier.

"On my return, Jenny, I shall refurnish your room in superior style. That big Matilda, who pesters you

with comparisons and her real India shawls imported by the suite of the Russian ambassador, and her silver plate and her Russian prince, — who to my mind is nothing but a humbug, — won't have a word to say *then*. I consecrate to the adornment of your room all the 'Children' I shall get in the provinces."

"Well, that's a pretty thing to say!" cried the florist. "Monster of a man! Do you dare to talk to me of your children? Do you suppose I am going to stand that sort of thing?"

"Oh, what a goose you are, my Jenny! That's only a figure of speech in our business."

"A fine business, then!"

"Well, but listen; if you talk all the time you'll always be in the right."

"I mean to be. Upon my word, you take things easy!"

"You don't let me finish. I have taken under my protection a superlative idea, — a journal, a newspaper, written for children. In our profession, when travellers have caught, let us suppose, ten subscribers to the 'Children's Journal,' they say, 'I've got ten Children,' just as I say when I get ten subscriptions to a newspaper called the 'Movement,' 'I've got ten Movements.' Now don't you see?"

"That's all right. Are you going into politics? If you do you'll get into Sainte-Pélagie, and I shall have to trot down there after you. Oh! if one only knew what one puts one's foot into when we love a man, on my word of honor we would let you alone to take care of yourselves, you men! However, if you are going away to-morrow we won't talk of disagreeable things, — that would be silly."

The coach stopped before a pretty house, newly built in the Rue d'Artois, where Gaudissart and Jenny climbed to the fourth story. This was the abode of Mademoiselle Jenny Courand, commonly reported to be privately married to the illustrious Gaudissart, a rumor which that individual did not deny. To maintain her supremacy, Jenny kept him to the performance of innumerable small attentions, and threatened continually to turn him off if he omitted the least of them. She now ordered him to write to her from every town, and render a minute account of all his proceedings.

"How many 'Children' will it take to furnish my chamber?" she asked, throwing off her shawl and sitting down by a good fire.

"I get five *sous* for each subscriber."

"Delightful! And is it with five *sous* that you expect to make me rich? Perhaps you are like the Wandering Jew with your pockets full of money."

"But, Jenny, I shall get a thousand 'Children.' Just reflect that children have never had a newspaper to themselves before. But what a fool I am to try to explain matters to you, — you can't understand such things."

"Can't I? Then tell me, — tell me, Gaudissart, if I'm such a goose why do you love me?"

"Just because you are a goose, — a sublime goose! Listen, Jenny. See here, I am going to undertake the 'Globe,' the 'Movement,' the 'Children,' the insurance business, and some of my old *articles Paris*; so instead of earning a miserable eight or ten thousand francs a year, rolling a stone like Mayeux, I shall bring back twenty to thirty thousand from each trip."

"Not really, Gaudissart?"

"Yes, truly," said the traveller, complacently; "I shall become a shareholder in the newspapers, like Finot, one of my friends, the son of a hatter, who now has thirty thousand francs income, and is going to make himself a peer of France. When one thinks of that little Popinot — ah, *mon Dieu!* I forgot to tell you that Monsieur Popinot was named minister of commerce yesterday. Why should n't I be ambitious too? Ha! ha! I could easily pick up the jargon of those fellows who talk in the Chamber, and be made a minister, and bluster with the rest of them. Now, listen to me: —

"Gentlemen," he said, standing behind a chair, "the Press is neither a tool nor an article of barter: it is, viewed under its political aspects, an institution. We are bound, in virtue of our position as legislators, to consider all things politically, and therefore" (here he stopped to get breath) — "and therefore we must examine the Press and ask ourselves if it is useful or noxious, if it should be encouraged or put down, taxed or free. These are serious questions. I feel that I do not waste the time, always most precious, of this Chamber by examining this article — the Press — and explaining to you its qualities. We are on the verge of an abyss. Undoubtedly the laws have not the nap which they ought to have — Hein?" he said, looking at Jenny. "All orators put France on the verge of an abyss. They either say that or they talk about the chariot of state, or convulsions, or political horizons. Don't I know their dodges? I'm up to all the tricks of all the trades. Do you know why? Because I was born with a caul; my mother has got it, but I'll

give it to you. You 'll see! I shall soon be in the government."

"You!"

"Why should n't I be the Baron Gaudissart, peer of France? Have n't they twice elected Monsieur Popinot as deputy from the fourth arrondissement? He dines with Louis Philippe. There 's Finot; he is going to be, they say, a member of the Council. Suppose they send me as ambassador to London? I tell you I'd nonplus those English! No man ever got the better of Gaudissart, the illustrious Gaudissart, and nobody ever will. Yes, I say it! no one ever outwitted me, and no one can — in any walk of life, politics or impolitics, here or elsewhere. But, for the time being, I must give myself wholly to the capitalists; to the 'Globe,' the 'Movement,' the 'Children,' and my *article Paris*."

"You will be brought up with a round turn, you and your newspapers. I 'll bet you won't get further than Poitiers before the police nab you."

"What will you bet?"

"A shawl."

"Done! If I lose that shawl I 'll go back to the *article Paris* and the hat business. But as for getting the better of Gaudissart — never! never!"

And the illustrious traveller threw himself into position before Jenny, looked at her proudly, one hand in his waistcoat, his head at a three-quarter profile, — an attitude truly Napoleonic.

"Oh, how funny you are! what have you been eating to-night?"

Gaudissart was thirty-eight years of age, of medium

height, stout and fat like men who roll about continually in stage-coaches, with a face as round as a pumpkin, ruddy cheeks, and regular features of the type which sculptors of all lands adopt as a model for statues of Abundance, Law, Force, Commerce, and the like. His protuberant stomach swelled forth in the shape of a pear; his legs were small, but active and vigorous. He caught Jenny up in his arms like a baby and kissed her.

"Hold your tongue, young woman!" he said. "What do you know about Saint-Simonism, antagonism, Fourierism, criticism, heroic enterprise, or woman's freedom? I'll tell you what they are, — ten francs for each subscription, Madame Gaudissart."

"On my word of honor, you are going crazy, Gaudissart."

"More and more crazy about *you*," he replied, flinging his hat upon the sofa.

The next morning Gaudissart, having breakfasted gloriously with Jenny, departed on horseback to work up the chief towns of the district to which he was assigned by the various enterprises in whose interests he was now about to exercise his great talents. After spending forty-five days in beating up the country between Paris and Blois, he remained two weeks at the latter place to write up his correspondence and make short visits to the various market towns of the department. The night before he left Blois for Tours he indited a letter to Mademoiselle Jenny Courand. As the conciseness and charm of this epistle cannot be equalled by any narration of ours, and as, moreover, it proves the legitimacy of the tie which united these two individuals, we produce it here: —

"My dear Jenny, — You will lose your wager. Like Napoleon, Gaudissart the illustrious has his star, but *not* his Waterloo. I triumph everywhere. Life insurance has done well. Between Paris and Blois I lodged two millions. But as I get to the centre of France heads become infinitely harder and millions correspondingly scarce. The *article Paris* keeps up its own little jog-trot. It is a ring on the finger. With all my well-known cunning I spit these shopkeepers like larks. I got off one hundred and sixty-two Ternaux shawls at Orleans. I am sure I don't know what they will do with them, unless they return them to the backs of the sheep.

"As to the *article journal* — the devil! that's a horse of another color. Holy saints! how one has to warble before you can teach these bumpkins a new tune. I have only made sixty-two 'Movements:' exactly a hundred less for the whole trip than the shawls in one town. Those republican rogues! they won't subscribe. You talk, they talk; they share your opinions, and presently you are all agreed that every existing thing must be overturned. You feel sure your man is going to subscribe. Not a bit of it! If he owns three feet of ground, enough to grow ten cabbages, or a few trees to slice into toothpicks, the fellow begins to talk of consolidated property, taxes, revenues, indemnities, — a whole lot of stuff, and I have wasted my time and breath on patriotism. It's a bad business! Candidly, the 'Movement' does not move. I have written to the directors and told them so. I am sorry for it — on account of my political opinions.

"As for the 'Globe,' that's another breed altogether. Just set to work and talk new doctrines to people you fancy are fools enough to believe such lies — why, they think you want to burn their houses down! It is in vain for me to tell them that I speak for futurity, for posterity, for self-interest properly understood; for enterprise where nothing can be lost; that man has preyed upon man long enough; that

woman is a slave; that the great providential thought should be made to triumph; that a way must be found to arrive at a rational co-ordination of the social fabric, — in short, the whole reverberation of my sentences. Well, what do you think? when I open upon them with such ideas these provincials lock their cupboards as if I wanted to steal their spoons and beg me to go away! Are not they fools? geese? The 'Globe' is smashed. I said to the proprietors, 'You are too advanced, you go ahead too fast: you ought to get a few results; the provinces like results.' However, I have made a hundred 'Globes,' and I must say, considering the thick-headedness of these clodhoppers, it is a miracle. But to do it I had to make them such a lot of promises that I am sure I don't know how the globites, globists, globules, or whatever they call themselves, will ever get out of them. But they always tell me they can make the world a great deal better than it is, so I go ahead and prophesy to the value of ten francs for each subscription. There was one farmer who thought the paper was agricultural because of its name. I Globed *him*. Bah! he gave in at once; he had a projecting forehead; all men with projecting foreheads are ideologists.

"But the 'Children'; oh! ah! as to the 'Children'! I got two thousand between Paris and Blois. Jolly business! but there is not much to say. You just show a little vignette to the mother, pretending to hide it from the child: naturally the child wants to see, and pulls mamma's gown and cries for its newspaper, because 'Papa has *dot* his.' Mamma can't let her brat tear the gown; the gown costs thirty francs, the subscription six — economy; result, subscription. It is an excellent thing, meets an actual want; it holds a place between dolls and sugar-plums, the two eternal necessities of childhood.

"I have had a quarrel here at the table d'hôte about the newspapers and my opinions. I was unsuspiciously eating my dinner next to a man with a gray hat who was reading the 'Debats.' I said to myself, 'Now for my rostrum eloquence. He is tied to the dynasty; I'll cook him; this

triumph will be capital practice for my ministerial talents.' So I went to work and praised his 'Debats.' Hein! if I didn't lead him along! Thread by thread, I began to net my man. I launched my four-horse phrases, and the F-sharp arguments, and all the rest of the cursed stuff. Everybody listened; and I saw a man who had July as plain as day on his mustache, just ready to nibble at a 'Movement.' Well, I don't know how it was, but I unluckily let fall the word 'blockhead.' Thunder! you should have seen my gray hat, my dynastic hat (shocking bad hat, anyhow), who got the bit in his teeth and was furiously angry. I put on my grand air — you know — and said to him: 'Ah, ça! Monsieur, you are remarkably aggressive; if you are not content, I am ready to give you satisfaction; I fought in July.' 'Though the father of a family,' he replied, 'I am ready —' 'Father of a family!' I exclaimed; 'my dear sir, have you any children?' 'Yes.' 'Twelve years old?' 'Just about.' 'Well, then, the "Children's Journal" is the very thing for you; six francs a year, one number a month, double columns, edited by great literary lights, well got up, good paper, engravings from charming sketches by our best artists, actual colored drawings of the Indies — will not fade.' I fired my broadside 'feelings of a father, etc., etc.,' — in short, a subscription instead of a quarrel. 'There's nobody but Gaudissart who can get out of things like that,' said that little cricket Lamard to the big Bulot at the café, when he told him the story.

"I leave to-morrow for Amboise. I shall do up Amboise in two days, and I will write next from Tours, where I shall measure swords with the inhabitants of that colorless region; colorless, I mean, from the intellectual and speculative point of view. But, on the word of a Gaudissart, they shall be toppled over, toppled down — floored, I say.

"Adieu, my kitten. Love me always; be faithful; fidelity through thick and thin is one of the attributes of the Free Woman. Who is kissing you on the eyelids?

"THY FELIX FOREVER."

III.

Five days later Gaudissart started from the Hôtel des Faisans, at which he had put up in Tours, and went to Vouvray, a rich and populous district where the public mind seemed to him susceptible of cultivation. Mounted upon his horse, he trotted along the embankment thinking no more of his phrases than an actor thinks of his part which he has played for a hundred times. It was thus that the illustrious Gaudissart went his cheerful way, admiring the landscape, and little dreaming that in the happy valleys of Vouvray his commercial infallibility was about to perish.

Here a few remarks upon the public mind of Touraine are essential to our story. The subtle, satirical, epigrammatic tale-telling spirit stamped on every page of Rabelais is the faithful expression of the Tourangian mind, — a mind polished and refined as it should be in a land where the kings of France long held their court; ardent, artistic, poetic, voluptuous, yet whose first impulses subside quickly. The softness of the atmosphere, the beauty of the climate, a certain ease of life and joviality of manners, smother before long the sentiment of art, narrow the widest heart, and enervate the strongest will. Transplant the Tourangian, and his fine qualities develop and lead to great results, as we may see in many spheres of action: look at Rabelais and Semblançay, Plantin the printer and Descartes, Boucicault, the

Napoleon of his day, and Pinaigrier, who painted most of the colored glass in our cathedrals; also Verville and Courier. But the Tourangian, distinguished though he be in other regions, sits in his own home like an Indian on his mat or a Turk on his divan. He employs his wit in laughing at his neighbor and in making merry all his days; and when at last he reaches the end of his life, he is still a happy man. Touraine is like the Abbaye of Thélême, so vaunted in the history of Gargantua. There we may find the complying sisterhoods of that famous tale, and there the good cheer celebrated by Rabelais reigns in glory.

As to the do-nothingness of that blessed land it is sublime and well expressed in a certain popular legend: "Tourangian, are you hungry, do you want some soup?" "Yes." "Bring your porringer." "Then I am not hungry." Is it to the joys of the vineyard and the harmonious loveliness of this garden land of France, is it to the peace and tranquillity of a region where the step of an invader has never trodden, that we owe the soft compliance of these unconstrained and easy manners? To such questions no answer. Enter this Turkey of sunny France, and you will stay there, — lazy, idle, happy. You may be as ambitious as Napoleon, as poetic as Lord Byron, and yet a power unknown, invisible, will compel you to bury your poetry within your soul and turn your projects into dreams.

The illustrious Gaudissart was fated to encounter here in Vouvray one of those indigenous jesters whose jests are not intolerable solely because they have reached the perfection of the mocking art. Right or wrong, the Tourangians are fond of inheriting from their parents.

Consequently the doctrines of Saint-Simon were especially hated and vilified among them. In Touraine hatred and vilification take the form of superb disdain and witty maliciousness worthy of the land of good stories and practical jokes, — a spirit which, alas! is yielding, day by day, to that other spirit which Lord Byron has characterized as "English cant."

For his sins, after getting down at the Soleil d'Or, an inn kept by a former grenadier of the imperial guard named Mitouflet, married to a rich widow, the illustrious traveller, after a brief consultation with the landlord, betook himself to the knave of Vouvray, the jovial merry-maker, the comic man of the neighborhood, compelled by fame and nature to supply the town with merriment. This country Figaro was once a dyer, and now possessed about seven or eight thousand francs a year, a pretty house on the slope of the hill, a plump little wife, and robust health. For ten years he had had nothing to do but take care of his wife and his garden, marry his daughter, play whist in the evenings, keep the run of all the gossip of the neighborhood, meddle with the elections, squabble with the large proprietors, and order good dinners; or else trot along the embankment to find out what was going on in Tours, torment the curé, and finally, by way of dramatic entertainment, assist at the sale of lands in the neighborhood of his vineyards. In short, he led the true Tourangian life, — the life of a little country-townsman. He was, moreover, an important member of the *bourgeoisie*, — a leader among the small proprietors, all of them envious, jealous, delighted to catch up and retail gossip and calumnies against the aristocracy; dragging things

down to their own level; and at war with all kinds of superiority, which they despised with the fine composure of ignorance.] Monsieur Vernier — such was the name of this great little man — was just finishing his breakfast, with his wife and daughter on either side of him, when Gaudissart entered the room through a window that looked out on the Loire and the Cher, and lighted one of the gayest dining-rooms of that gay land.

"Is this Monsieur Vernier himself?" said the traveller, bending his vertebral column with such grace that it seemed to be elastic.

"Yes, Monsieur," said the mischievous ex-dyer, with a scrutinizing look which took in the style of man he had to deal with.

"I come, Monsieur," resumed Gaudissart, "to solicit the aid of your knowledge and insight to guide my efforts in this district, where Mitouflet tells me you have the greatest influence. Monsieur, I am sent into the provinces on an enterprise of the utmost importance, undertaken by bankers who — "

"Who mean to win our tricks," said Vernier, long used to the ways of commercial travellers and to their periodical visits.

"Precisely," replied Gaudissart, with native impudence. "But with your fine tact, Monsieur, you must be aware that we can't win tricks from people unless it is their interest to play at cards. I beg you not to confound me with the vulgar herd of travellers who succeed by humbug or importunity. I am no longer a commercial traveller. I was one, and I glory in it; but to-day my mission is of higher importance, and should

place me, in the minds of superior people, among those who devote themselves to the enlightenment of their country. The most distinguished bankers in Paris take part in this affair; not fictitiously, as in some shameful speculations which I call rat-traps. No, no, nothing of the kind! I should never condescend — never! — to hawk about such *catch-fools.* No, Monsieur; the most respectable houses in Paris are concerned in this enterprise; and their interests guarantee —"

Hereupon Gaudissart drew forth his whole string of phrases, and Monsieur Vernier let him go to the length of his tether, listening with an apparent interest which completely deceived him. But after the word "guarantee" Vernier paid no further attention to our traveller's rhetoric, and turned over in his mind how to play him some malicious trick and deliver a land, justly considered half-savage by speculators unable to get a bite of it, from the inroads of these Parisian caterpillars.

At the head of an enchanting valley, called the Valley Coquette because of its windings and the curves which return upon each other at every step, and seem more and more lovely as we advance, whether we ascend or descend them, there lived, in a little house surrounded by vineyards, a half-insane man named Margaritis. He was of Italian origin, married, but childless; and his wife took care of him with a courage fully appreciated by the neighborhood. Madame Margaritis was undoubtedly in real danger from a man who, among other fancies, persisted in carrying about with him two long-bladed knives with which he sometimes threatened her. Who has not seen the wonderful

self-devotion shown by provincials who consecrate their lives to the care of sufferers, possibly because of the disgrace heaped upon a *bourgeoise* if she allows her husband or children to be taken to a public hospital? Moreover, who does not know the repugnance which these people feel to the payment of the two or three thousand francs required at Charenton or in the private lunatic asylums? If any one had spoken to Madame Margaritis of Doctors Dubuisson, Esquirol, Blanche, and others, she would have preferred, with noble indignation, to keep her thousands and take care of the "good-man" at home.

As the incomprehensible whims of this lunatic are connected with the current of our story, we are compelled to exhibit the most striking of them. Margaritis went out as soon as it rained, and walked about bareheaded in his vineyard. At home he made incessant inquiries for newspapers; to satisfy him his wife and the maid-servant used to give him an old journal called the "Indre-et-Loire," and for seven years he had never yet perceived that he was reading the same number over and over again. Perhaps a doctor would have observed with interest the connection that evidently existed between the recurring and spasmodic demands for the newspaper and the atmospheric variations of the weather.

Usually when his wife had company, which happened nearly every evening, for the neighbors, pitying her situation, would frequently come to play at boston in her *salon*, Margaritis remained silent in a corner and never stirred. But the moment ten o'clock began to strike on a clock which he kept shut up in a large

oblong closet, he rose at the stroke with the mechanical precision of the figures which are made to move by springs in the German toys. He would then advance slowly towards the players, give them a glance like the automatic gaze of the Greeks and Turks exhibited on the Boulevard du Temple, and say sternly, "Go away!" There were days when he had lucid intervals and could give his wife excellent advice as to the sale of their wines; but at such times he became extremely annoying, and would ransack her closets and steal her delicacies, which he devoured in secret. Occasionally, when the usual visitors made their appearance he would treat them with civility; but as a general thing his remarks and replies were incoherent. For instance, a lady once asked him, "How do you feel to-day, Monsieur Margaritis?" "I have grown a beard," he replied, "have you?" "Are you better?" asked another. "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" was the answer. But the greater part of the time he gazed stolidly at his guests without uttering a word; and then his wife would say, "The good-man does not hear anything to-day."

On two or three occasions in the course of five years, and usually about the time of the equinox, this remark had driven him to frenzy; he flourished his knives and shouted, "That joke dishonors me!"

As for his daily life, he ate, drank, and walked about like other men in sound health; and so it happened that he was treated with about the same respect and attention that we give to a heavy piece of furniture. Among his many absurdities was one of which no man had as yet discovered the object, although by long

practice the wiseheads of the community had learned to unravel the meaning of most of his vagaries. He insisted on keeping a sack of flour and two puncheons of wine in the cellar of his house, and he would allow no one to lay hands on them. But when the month of June came round he grew uneasy with the restless anxiety of a madman about the sale of the sack and the puncheons. Madame Margaritis could nearly always persuade him that the wine had been sold at an enormous price, which she paid over to him, and which he hid so cautiously that neither his wife nor the servant who watched him had ever been able to discover its hiding-place.

The evening before Gaudissart reached Vouvray Madame Margaritis had had more difficulty than usual in deceiving her husband, whose mind happened to be uncommonly lucid.

"I really don't know how I shall get through to-morrow," she had said to Madame Vernier. "Would you believe it, the good-man insists on watching his two casks of wine. He has worried me so this whole day, that I had to show him two full puncheons. Our neighbor, Pierre Champlain, fortunately had two which he had not sold. I asked him to kindly let me have them rolled into our cellar; and oh, dear! now that the good-man has seen them he insists on bottling them off himself."

Madame Vernier had related the poor woman's trouble to her husband just before the entrance of Gaudissart, and at the first words of the famous traveller Vernier determined that he should be made to grapple with Margaritis.

"Monsieur," said the ex-dyer, as soon as the illustrious Gaudissart had fired his first broadside, "I will not hide from you the great difficulties which my native place offers to your enterprise. This part of the country goes along, as it were, in the rough, — *suo modo.* It is a country where new ideas don't take hold. We live as our fathers lived, we amuse ourselves with four meals a day, and we cultivate our vineyards and sell our wines to the best advantage. Our business principle is to sell things for more than they cost us; we shall stick in that rut, and neither God nor the devil can get us out of it. I will, however, give you some advice, and good advice is an egg in the hand. There is in this town a retired banker in whose wisdom I have — I, particularly — the greatest confidence. If you can obtain his support, I will add mine. If your proposals have real merit, if we are convinced of the advantage of your enterprise, the approval of Monsieur Margaritis (which carries with it mine) will open to you at least twenty rich houses in Vouvray who will be glad to try your specifics."

When Madame Vernier heard the name of the lunatic she raised her head and looked at her husband.

"Ah, precisely; my wife intends to call on Madame Margaritis with one of our neighbors. Wait a moment, and you can accompany these ladies — You can pick up Madame Fontanieu on your way," said the wily dyer, winking at his wife.

To pick out the greatest gossip, the sharpest tongue, the most inveterate cackler of the neighborhood! It meant that Madame Vernier was to take a witness to the scene between the traveller and the lunatic who

should keep the town in laughter for a month. Monsieur and Madame Vernier played their part so well that Gaudissart had no suspicions, and straightway fell into the trap. He gallantly offered his arm to Madame Vernier, and believed that he made, as they went along, the conquest of both ladies, for whose benefit he sparkled with wit and humor and undetected puns.

The house of the pretended banker stood at the entrance to the Valley Coquette. The place, called La Fuye, had nothing remarkable about it. On the ground floor was a large wainscoted *salon*, on either side of which opened the bedroom of the good-man and that of his wife. The *salon* was entered from an ante-chamber, which served as the dining-room and communicated with the kitchen. This lower floor, which was wholly without the external charm usually seen even in the humblest dwellings in Touraine, was covered by a mansard story, reached by a stairway built on the outside of the house against the gable end and protected by a shed-roof. A little garden, full of marigolds, syringas, and elder-bushes, separated the house from the fields; and all around the courtyard were detached buildings which were used in the vintage season for the various processes of making wine.

IV.

MARGARITIS was seated in an arm-chair covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, near the window of the *salon*, and he did not stir as the two ladies entered with Gaudissart. His thoughts were running on the casks of wine. He was a spare man, and his bald head, garnished with a few spare locks at the back of it, was pear-shaped in conformation. His sunken eyes, overtopped by heavy black brows and surrounded by discolored circles, his nose, thin and sharp like the blade of a knife, the strongly marked jawbone, the hollow cheeks, and the oblong tendency of all these lines, together with his unnaturally long and flat chin, contributed to give a peculiar expression to his countenance, — something between that of a retired professor of rhetoric and a rag-picker.

"Monsieur Margaritis," cried Madame Vernier, addressing him, "come, stir about! Here is a gentleman whom my husband sends to you, and you must listen to him with great attention. Put away your mathematics and talk to him."

On hearing these words the lunatic rose, looked at Gaudissart, made him a sign to sit down, and said, "Let us converse, Monsieur."

The two women went into Madame Margaritis' bedroom, leaving the door open so as to hear the conversation, and interpose if it became necessary. They were hardly installed before Monsieur Vernier crept

softly up through the field and, opening a window, got into the bedroom without noise.

"Monsieur has doubtless been in business?—" began Gaudissart.

"Public business," answered Margaritis interrupting him. "I pacificated Calabria under the reign of King Murat."

"Bless me! if he has n't gone to Calabria!" whispered Monsieur Vernier.

"In that case," said Gaudissart, "we shall quickly understand each other."

"I am listening," said Margaritis, striking the attitude taken by a man when he poses to a portrait-painter.

"Monsieur," said Gaudissart, who chanced to be turning his watch-key with a rotatory and periodical click which caught the attention of the lunatic and contributed no doubt to keep him quiet. "Monsieur, if you were not a man of superior intelligence" (the fool bowed), "I should content myself with merely laying before you the material advantages of this enterprise, whose psychological aspects it would be a waste of time to explain to you. Listen! Of all kinds of social wealth, is not time the most precious? To economize time is, consequently, to become wealthy. Now, is there anything that consumes so much time as those anxieties which I call '*pot-boiling*'?—a vulgar expression, but it puts the whole question in a nutshell. For instance, what can eat up more time than the inability to give proper security to persons from whom you seek to borrow money when, poor at the moment, you are nevertheless rich in hope?"

"Money, — yes, that's right," said Margaritis.

"Well, Monsieur, I am sent into the departments by a company of bankers and capitalists, who have apprehended the enormous waste which rising men of talent are thus making of time, and, consequently, of intelligence and productive ability. We have seized the idea of capitalizing for such men their future prospects, and cashing their talents by discounting — what? TIME; securing the value of it to their survivors. I may say that it is no longer a question of economizing time, but of giving it a price, a quotation; of representing in a pecuniary sense those products developed by time which presumably you possess in the region of your intellect; of representing also the moral qualities with which you are endowed, and which are, Monsieur, living forces, — as living as a cataract, as a steam-engine of three, ten, twenty, fifty horse-power. Ha! this is progress! the movement onward to a better state of things; a movement born of the spirit of our epoch; a movement essentially progressive, as I shall prove to you when we come to consider the principles involved in the logical co-ordination of the social fabric. I will now explain my meaning by literal examples, leaving aside all purely abstract reasoning, which I call the mathematics of thought. Instead of being, as you are, a proprietor living upon your income, let us suppose that you are a painter, a musician, an artist, or a poet —"

"I am a painter," said the lunatic.

"Well, so be it. I see you take my metaphor. You are a painter; you have a glorious future, a rich future before you. But I go still farther —"

At these words the madman looked anxiously at Gaudissart, thinking he meant to go away; but was reassured when he saw that he kept his seat.

"You may even be nothing at all," said Gaudissart, going on with his phrases, "but you are conscious of yourself; you feel yourself —"

"I feel myself," said the lunatic.

"— you feel yourself a great man; you say to yourself, 'I will be a minister of state.' Well, then, you — painter, artist, man of letters, statesman of the future — you reckon upon your talents, you estimate their value, you rate them, let us say, at a hundred thousand crowns —"

"Do you give me a hundred thousand crowns?"

"Yes, Monsieur, as you will see. Either your heirs and assigns will receive them if you die, for the company contemplates that event, or you will receive them in the long run through your works of art, your writings or your fortunate speculations during your lifetime. But, as I have already had the honor to tell you, when you have once fixed upon the value of your intellectual capital, — for it is intellectual capital, —seize that idea firmly, — intellectual —"

"I understand," said the fool.

"You sign a policy of insurance with a company which recognizes in you a value of a hundred thousand crowns; in you, poet —"

"I am a painter," said the lunatic.

"Yes," resumed Gaudissart, — "painter, poet, musician, statesman — and binds itself to pay them over to your family, your heirs, if, by reason of your death, the hopes founded on your intellectual capital should be

overthrown for you personally. The payment of the premium is all that is required to protect—"

"The money-box," said the lunatic, sharply interrupting him.

"Ah! naturally; yes. I see that Monsieur understands business."

"Yes," said the madman. "I established the Territorial Bank in the Rue des Fossés-Montmartre at Paris in 1798.

"For," resumed Gaudissart, going back to his premium, "in order to meet the payments on the intellectual capital which each man recognizes and esteems in himself, it is of course necessary that each should pay a certain premium, three per cent; an annual due of three per cent. Thus, by the payment of this trifling sum, a mere nothing, you protect your family from disastrous results at your death—"

"But I live," said the fool.

"Ah! yes; you mean if you should live long? That is the usual objection,—a vulgar prejudice. I fully agree that if we had not foreseen and demolished it we might feel we were unworthy of being—what? What are we, after all? Book-keepers in the great Bureau of Intellect. Monsieur, I don't apply these remarks to you, but I meet on all sides men who make it a business to teach new ideas and disclose chains of reasoning to people who turn pale at the first word. On my word of honor, it is pitiable! But that's the way of the world, and I don't pretend to reform it. Your objection, Monsieur, is really sheer nonsense."

"Why?" asked the lunatic.

"Why? — this is why: because, if you live and possess the qualities which are estimated in your policy against the chances of death, — now, attend to this — "

"I am attending."

"Well, then, you have succeeded in life; and you have succeeded because of the said insurance. You doubled your chances of success by getting rid of the anxieties you were dragging about with you in the shape of wife and children who might otherwise be left destitute at your death. If you attain this certainty, you have touched the value of your intellectual capital, on which the cost of insurance is a trifle, — a mere trifle, a bagatelle."

"That 's a fine idea!"

"Ah! is it not, Monsieur?" cried Gaudissart. "I call this enterprise the exchequer of beneficence; a mutual insurance against poverty; or, if you like it better, the discounting, the cashing, of talent. For talent, Monsieur, is a bill of exchange which Nature gives to the man of genius, and which often has a long time to run before it falls due."

"That is usury!" cried Margaritis.

"The devil! he 's keen, the old fellow! I 've made a mistake," thought Gaudissart, "I must catch him with other chaff. I 'll try humbug No. 1. Not at all," he said aloud, "for you who — "

"Will you take a glass of wine?" asked Margaritis.

"With pleasure," replied Gaudissart.

"Wife, give us a bottle of the wine that is in the puncheons. You are here at the very head of Vouvray," he continued, with a gesture of the hand, "the vineyard of Margaritis."

The maid-servant brought glasses and a bottle of wine of the vintage of 1819. The good-man filled a glass with circumspection and offered it to Gaudissart, who drank it up.

"Ah, you are joking, Monsieur!" exclaimed the commercial traveller. "Surely this is Madeira, true Madeira?"

"So you think," said the fool. "The trouble with our Vouvray wine is that it is neither a common wine, nor a wine that can be drunk with the *entremets*. It is too generous, too strong. It is often sold in Paris adulterated with brandy and called Madeira. The wine-merchants buy it up, when our vintage has not been good enough for the Dutch and Belgian markets, to mix it with wines grown in the neighborhood of Paris, and call it Bordeaux. But what you are drinking just now, my good Monsieur, is a wine for kings, the pure Head of Vouvray, — that's its name. I have two puncheons, only two puncheons of it left. People who like fine wines, high-class wines, who furnish their table with qualities that can't be bought in the regular trade, — and there are many persons in Paris who have that vanity, — well, such people send direct to us for this wine. Do you know any one who —?"

"Let us go on with what we were saying," interposed Gaudissart.

"We are going on," said the fool. "My wine is capital; you are capital, capitalist, intellectual capital, capital wine, — all the same etymology, don't you see? hein? Capital, *caput*, head, Head of Vouvray, that's my wine, — it's all one thing."

"So that you have realized your intellectual capital through your wines? Ah, I see!" said Gaudissart.

"I have realized," said the lunatic. "Would you like to buy my puncheons? you shall have them on good terms."

"No, I was merely speaking," said the illustrious Gaudissart, "of the results of insurance and the employment of intellectual capital. I will resume my argument."

The lunatic calmed down, and fell once more into position.

"I remarked, Monsieur, that if you die the capital will be paid to your family without discussion."

"Without discussion?"

"Yes, unless there were suicide."

"That 's quibbling."

"No, Monsieur; you are aware that suicide is one of those acts which are easy to prove —"

"In France," said the fool; "but —"

"But in other countries?" said Gaudissart. "Well, Monsieur, to cut short discussion on this point, I will say, once for all, that death in foreign countries or on the field of battle is outside of our —"

"Then what are you insuring? Nothing at all!" cried Margaritis. "My bank, my Territorial Bank, rested upon —"

"Nothing at all?" exclaimed Gaudissart, interrupting the good-man. "Nothing at all? What do you call sickness, and afflictions, and poverty, and passions? Don't go off on exceptional points."

"No, don't point," said the lunatic.

"Now, what 's the result of all this?" cried Gaudissart. "To you, a banker, I can sum up the profits in a

few words. Listen. A man lives; he has a future; he appears well; he lives, let us say, by his art; he wants money; he tries to get it, — he fails. Civilization withholds cash from this man whose thought could master civilization, and ought to master it, and will master it some day with a brush, a chisel, with words, ideas, theories, systems. Civilization is atrocious! It denies bread to the men who give it luxury. It starves them on sneers and curses, the beggarly rascal! My words may be strong, but I shall not retract them. Well, this great but neglected man comes to us; we recognize his greatness; we salute him with respect; we listen to him. He says to us: 'Gentlemen, my life and talents are worth so much; on my productions I will pay you such or such percentage.' Very good; what do we do? Instantly, without reserve or hesitation, we admit him to the great festivals of civilization as an honored guest —"

"You need wine for that," interposed the madman.

"— as an honored guest. He signs the insurance policy; he takes our bits of paper, — scraps, rags, miserable rags! — which, nevertheless, have more power in the world than his unaided genius. Then, if he wants money, every one will lend it to him on those rags. At the Bourse, among bankers, wherever he goes, even at the usurers, he will find money because he can give security. Well, Monsieur, is not that a great gulf to bridge over in our social system? But that is only one aspect of our work. We insure debtors by another scheme of policies and premiums. We offer annuities at rates graduated according to ages, on a sliding-scale infinitely more advantageous than what are called

tontines, which are based on tables of mortality that are notoriously false. Our company deals with large masses of men; consequently the annuitants are secure from those distressing fears which sadden old age, — too sad already! — fears which pursue those who receive annuities from private sources. You see, Monsieur, that we have estimated life under all its aspects."

"Sucked it at both ends," said the lunatic. "Take another glass of wine. You 've earned it. You must line your inside with velvet if you are going to pump at it like that every day. Monsieur, the wine of Vouvray, if well kept, is downright velvet."

"Now, what do you think of it all?" said Gaudissart, emptying his glass.

"It is very fine, very new, very useful; but I like the discounts I get at my Territorial Bank, Rue des Fossés-Montmartre."

"You are quite right, Monsieur," answered Gaudissart; "but that sort of thing is taken and retaken, made and remade, every day. You have also hypothecating banks which lend upon landed property and redeem it on a large scale. But that is a narrow idea compared to our system of consolidating hopes, — consolidating hopes! coagulating, so to speak, the aspirations born in every soul, and insuring the realization of our dreams. It needed our epoch, Monsieur, the epoch of transition — transition and progress — "

"Yes, progress," muttered the lunatic, with his glass at his lips. "I like progress. That is what I 've told them many times — "

"The 'Times'!" cried Gaudissart, who did not

catch the whole sentence. "The 'Times' is a bad newspaper. If you read that, I am sorry for you."

"The newspaper!" cried Margaritis. "Of course! Wife! wife! where is the newspaper?" he cried, going towards the next room.

"If you are interested in newspapers," said Gaudissart, changing his attack, "we are sure to understand each other."

"Yes; but before we say anything about that, tell me what you think of this wine."

"Delicious!"

"Then let us finish the bottle." The lunatic poured out a thimbleful for himself and filled Gaudissart's glass. "Well, Monsieur, I have two puncheons left of the same wine; if you find it good we can come to terms."

"Exactly," said Gaudissart. "The fathers of the Saint-Simonian faith have authorized me to send them all the commodities I — But allow me to tell you about their noble newspaper. You, who have understood the whole question of insurance so thoroughly, and who are willing to assist my work in this district —"

"Yes," said Margaritis, "if —"

"If I take your wine; I understand perfectly. Your wine is very good, Monsieur; it puts the stomach in a glow."

"They make champagne out of it; there is a man from Paris who comes here and makes it in Tours."

"I have no doubt of it, Monsieur. The 'Globe,' of which we were speaking —"

"Yes, I've gone over it," said Margaritis.

"I was sure of it!" exclaimed Gaudissart. "Monsieur, you have a fine frontal development; a pate —

excuse the word — which our gentlemen call *horse-head.* There 's a horse element in the head of every great man. Genius will make itself known; but sometimes it happens that great men, in spite of their gifts, remain obscure. Such was very nearly the case with Saint-Simon; also with Monsieur Vico, — a strong man just beginning to shoot up; I am proud of Vico. Now, here we enter upon the new theory and formula of humanity. Attention, if you please."

"Attention!" said the fool, falling into position.

"Man's spoliation of man — by which I mean bodies of men living upon the labor of other men — ought to have ceased with the coming of Christ, I say *Christ,* who was sent to proclaim the equality of man in the sight of God. But what is the fact? Equality up to our day has been an *ignus fatuus*, a chimera. Saint-Simon has arisen as the complement of Christ; as the modern exponent of the doctrine of equality, or rather of its practice, for theory has served its time — "

"Is he liberated?" asked the lunatic.

"Like liberalism, it has had its day. There is a nobler future before us: a new faith, free labor, free growth, free production, individual progress, a social co-ordination in which each man shall receive the full worth of his individual labor, in which no man shall be preyed upon by other men who, without capacity of their own, compel *all* to work for the profit of *one.* From this comes the doctrine of — "

"How about servants?" demanded the lunatic.

"They will remain servants if they have no capacity beyond it."

"Then what 's the good of your doctrine?"

"To judge of this doctrine, Monsieur, you must consider it from a higher point of view: you must take a general survey of humanity. Here we come to the theories of Ballanche: do you know his Palingenesis?"

"I am fond of them," said the fool, who thought he said *ices*.

"Good!" returned Gaudissart. "Well, then, if the palingenistic aspects of the successive transformations of the spiritualized globe have struck, stirred, roused you, then, my dear sir, the 'Globe' newspaper, — noble name which proclaims its mission, — the 'Globe' is an organ, a guide, who will explain to you with the coming of each day the conditions under which this vast political and moral change will be effected. The gentlemen who —"

"Do they drink wine?"

"Yes, Monsieur; their houses are kept up in the highest style; I may say, in prophetic style. Superb *salons*, large receptions, the apex of social life —"

"Well," remarked the lunatic, "the workmen who pull things down want wine as much as those who put things up."

"True," said the illustrious Gaudissart, "and all the more, Monsieur, when they pull down with one hand and build up with the other, like the apostles of the 'Globe.'"

"They want good wine; Head of Vouvray, two puncheons, three hundred bottles, only one hundred francs, — a trifle!"

"How much is that a bottle?" said Gaudissart, calculating. "Let me see; there 's the freight and the duty, — it will come to about seven *sous*. Why, it

wouldn't be a bad thing: they give more for worse wines — (Good! I've got him!" thought Gaudissart, "he wants to sell me wine which I want; I'll master him) — Well, Monsieur," he continued, "those who argue usually come to an agreement. Let us be frank with each other. You have great influence in this district — "

"I should think so!" said the madman; "I am the Head of Vouvray!"

"Well, I see that you thoroughly comprehend the insurance of intellectual capital — "

"Thoroughly!"

"— and that you have measured the full importance of the 'Globe' — "

"Twice; on foot."

Gaudissart was listening to himself and not to his hearer.

"Therefore, in view of your circumstances and of your age, I quite understand that you have no need of insurance for yourself; but, Monsieur, you might induce others to insure, either because of their inherent qualities which need development, or for the protection of their families against a precarious future. Now, if you will subscribe to the 'Globe,' and give me your personal assistance in this district on behalf of insurance, especially life-annuity, — for the provinces are much attached to annuities — Well, if you will do this, then we can come to an understanding about the wine. Will you take the 'Globe'?"

"I stand on the globe."

"Will you advance its interests in this district?"

"I advance."

"And?"

"And —"

"And I — but you do subscribe, don't you, to the 'Globe'?"

"The globe, good thing, annuity," said the lunatic.

"Annuity, Monsieur? — ah, I see! yes, you are right: it is full of life, vigor, intellect, science, — absolutely crammed with science, — well printed, clear type, well set up; what I call 'good nap.' None of your botched stuff, cotton and wool, trumpery; flimsy rubbish that rips if you look at it. It is deep; it states questions on which you can meditate at your leisure; it is the very thing to make time pass agreeably in the country."

"That suits me," said the lunatic.

"It only costs a trifle, — eighty francs."

"That won't suit me," said the lunatic.

"Monsieur!" cried Gaudissart, "of course you have got grandchildren? There's the 'Children's Journal;' that only costs seven francs a year."

"Very good; take my wine, and I will subscribe to the 'Children.' That suits me very well: a fine idea! intellectual product, child. That's man living upon man, hein?"

"You've hit it, Monsieur," said Gaudissart.

"I've hit it!"

"You consent to push me in the district?"

"In the district."

"I have your approbation?"

"You have it."

"Well, then, Monsieur, I take your wine at a hundred francs —"

"No, no! hundred and ten — "

"Monsieur! A hundred and ten for the company, but a hundred to me. I enable you to make a sale; you owe me a commission."

"Charge 'em a hundred and twenty; that's plenty," said the fool.

"That's a rhyme!"

"About the wine —"

"Better and better! why, you are a poet."

"I am a poet," said the fool. "Come out and see my vineyards."

"Willingly, the wine is getting into my head," said the illustrious Gaudissart, following Monsieur Margaritis, who marched him from row to row and hillock to hillock among the vines. The three ladies and Monsieur Vernier, left to themselves, went off into fits of laughter as they watched the traveller and the lunatic discussing, gesticulating, stopping short, resuming their walk, and talking vehemently.

"I wish the good-man had n't carried him off," said Vernier.

Finally the pair returned, walking with the eager step of men who were in haste to finish up a matter of business.

"He has got the better of the Parisian, damn him!" cried Vernier.

And so it was. To the huge delight of the lunatic our illustrious Gaudissart sat down at a card-table and wrote an order for the delivery of the two casks of wine. Margaritis, having carefully read it over, counted out seven francs for his subscription to the "Children's Journal" and gave them to the traveller.

"Adieu until to-morrow, Monsieur," said Gaudissart, twisting his watch-key. "I shall have the honor to call for you to-morrow. Meantime, send the wine at once to Paris to the address I have given you, and the price will be remitted immediately."

Gaudissart, however, was a Norman, and he had no idea of making any agreement which was not reciprocal. He therefore required his promised supporter to sign a bond (which the lunatic carefully read over) to deliver two puncheons of the wine called "Head of Vouvray," vineyard of Margaritis.

This done, the illustrious Gaudissart departed in high feather, humming, as he skipped lightly along,—

"The King of the South,
He burned his mouth," etc.

V.

The illustrious Gaudissart returned to the Soleil d'Or, where he naturally conversed with the landlord while waiting for dinner. Mitouflet was an old soldier, guilelessly crafty, like the peasantry of the Loire; he never laughed at a jest, but took it with the gravity of a man accustomed to the roar of cannon and to make his own jokes under arms.

"You have some very strong-minded people here," said Gaudissart, leaning against the door-post and lighting his cigar at Mitouflet's pipe.

"How do you mean?" asked Mitouflet.

"I mean people who are rough-shod on political and financial ideas."

"Whom have you seen? if I may ask without indiscretion," said the landlord innocently, expectorating after the adroit and periodical fashion of smokers.

"A fine, energetic fellow named Margaritis."

Mitouflet cast two glances in succession at his guest which were expressive of chilling irony.

"May be; the good-man knows a deal. He knows too much for other folks, who can't always understand him."

"I can believe it, for he thoroughly comprehends the abstruse principles of finance."

"Yes," said the innkeeper, "and for my part, I am sorry he is a lunatic."

"A lunatic! What do you mean?"

"Well, crazy,—cracked, as people are when they are insane," answered Mitouflet. "But he is not dangerous; his wife takes care of him. Have you been arguing with him?" added the pitiless landlord; "that must have been funny!"

"Funny!" cried Gaudissart. "Funny! Then your Monsieur Vernier has been making fun of me!"

"Did he send you there?"

"Yes."

"Wife! wife! come here and listen. If Monsieur Vernier did n't take it into his head to send this gentleman to talk to Margaritis!"

"What in the world did you say to each other, my dear, good Monsieur?" said the wife. "Why, he's crazy!"

"He sold me two casks of wine."

"Did you buy them?"

"Yes."

"But that is his delusion; he thinks he sells his wine, and he has n't any."

"Ha!" snorted the traveller, "then I'll go straight to Monsieur Vernier and thank him."

And Gaudissart departed, boiling over with rage, to shake the ex-dyer, whom he found in his *salon*, laughing with a company of friends to whom he had already recounted the tale.

"Monsieur," said the prince of travellers, darting a savage glance at his enemy, "you are a scoundrel and a blackguard; and under pain of being thought a turnkey,—a species of being far below a galley-slave,—you will give me satisfaction for the insult you dared to

offer me in sending me to a man whom you knew to be a lunatic! Do you hear me, Monsieur Vernier, dyer?"

Such was the harangue which Gaudissart prepared as he went along, as a tragedian makes ready for his entrance on the scene.

"What!" cried Vernier, delighted at the presence of an audience, "do you think we have no right to make fun of a man who comes here, bag and baggage, and demands that we hand over our property because, forsooth, he is pleased to call us great men, painters, artists, poets, — mixing us up gratuitously with a set of fools who have neither house nor home, nor *sous* nor sense? Why should we put up with a rascal who comes here and wants us to feather his nest by subscribing to a newspaper which preaches a new religion whose first doctrine is, if you please, that we are not to inherit from our fathers and mothers? On my sacred word of honor, Père Margaritis said things a great deal more sensible. And now, what are you complaining about? You and Margaritis seemed to understand each other. The gentlemen here present can testify that if you had talked to the whole canton you could n't have been as well understood."

"That's all very well for you to say; but I have been insulted, Monsieur, and I demand satisfaction!"

"Very good, Monsieur! consider yourself insulted, if you like. I shall not give you satisfaction, because there is neither rhyme nor reason nor satisfaction to be found in the whole business. What an absurd fool he is, to be sure!"

At these words Gaudissart flew at the dyer to give him a slap on the face, but the listening crowd rushed

between them, so that the illustrious traveller only contrived to knock off the wig of his enemy, which fell on the head of Mademoiselle Clara Vernier.

"If you are not satisfied, Monsieur," he said, "I shall be at the Soleil d'Or until to-morrow morning, and you will find me ready to show you what it means to give satisfaction. I fought in July, Monsieur."

"And you shall fight in Vouvray," answered the dyer; "and what is more, you shall stay here longer than you imagine."

Gaudissart marched off, turning over in his mind this prophetic remark, which seemed to him full of sinister portent. For the first time in his life the prince of travellers did not dine jovially. The whole town of Vouvray was put in a ferment about the "affair" between Monsieur Vernier and the apostle of Saint-Simonism. Never before had the tragic event of a duel been so much as heard of in that benign and happy valley.

"Monsieur Mitouflet, I am to fight to-morrow with Monsieur Vernier," said Gaudissart to his landlord. "I know no one here: will you be my second?"

"Willingly," said the host.

Gaudissart had scarcely finished his dinner before Madame Fontanieu and the assistant-mayor of Vouvray came to the Soleil d'Or and took Mitouflet aside. They told him it would be a painful and injurious thing to the whole canton if a violent death were the result of this affair; they represented the pitiable distress of Madame Vernier, and conjured him to find some way to arrange matters and save the credit of the district.

"I take it all upon myself," said the sagacious landlord.

In the evening he went up to the traveller's room carrying pens, ink, and paper.

"What have you got there?" asked Gaudissart.

"If you are going to fight to-morrow," answered Mitouflet, "you had better make some settlement of your affairs; and perhaps you have letters to write, — we all have beings who are dear to us. Writing does n't kill, you know. Are you a good swordsman? Would you like to get your hand in? I have some foils."

"Yes, gladly."

Mitouflet returned with foils and masks.

"Now, then, let us see what you can do."

The pair put themselves on guard. Mitouflet, with his former prowess as grenadier of the guard, made sixty-two passes at Gaudissart, pushed him about right and left, and finally pinned him up against the wall.

"The deuce! you are strong," said Gaudissart, out of breath.

"Monsieur Vernier is stronger than I am."

"The devil! Damn it, I shall fight with pistols."

"I advise you to do so; because, if you take large holster pistols and load them up to their muzzles, you can't risk anything. They are *sure* to fire wide of the mark, and both parties can retire from the field with honor. Let me manage all that. Hein! *sapristi*, two brave men would be arrant fools to kill each other for a joke."

"Are you sure the pistols will carry *wide enough?* I should be sorry to kill the man, after all," said Gaudissart.

"Sleep in peace," answered Mitouflet, departing.

The next morning the two adversaries, more or less pale, met beside the bridge of La Cise. The brave Vernier came near shooting a cow which was peaceably feeding by the roadside.

"Ah, you fired in the air!" cried Gaudissart.

At these words the enemies embraced.

"Monsieur," said the traveller, "your joke was rather rough, but it was a good one for all that. I am sorry I apostrophized you: I was excited. I regard you as a man of honor."

"Monsieur, we take twenty subscriptions to the 'Children's Journal,'" replied the dyer, still pale.

"That being so," said Gaudissart, "why should n't we all breakfast together? Men who fight are always the ones to come to a good understanding."

"Monsieur Mitouflet," said Gaudissart on his return to the inn, "of course you have got a sheriff's officer here?"

"What for?"

"I want to send a summons to my good friend Margaritis to deliver the two casks of wine."

"But he has not got them," said Vernier.

"No matter for that; the affair can be arranged by the payment of an indemnity. I won't have it said that Vouvray outwitted the illustrious Gaudissart."

Madame Margaritis, alarmed at the prospect of a suit in which the plaintiff would certainly win his case, brought thirty francs to the placable traveller, who thereupon considered himself quits with the happiest region of sunny France, — a region which is also, we must add, the most recalcitrant to new and progressive ideas.

On returning from his trip through the southern departments, the illustrious Gaudissart occupied the coupé of a diligence, where he met a young man to whom, as they journeyed between Angoulême and Paris, he deigned to explain the enigmas of life, taking him, apparently, for an infant.

As they passed Vouvray the young man exclaimed, "What a fine site!"

"Yes, Monsieur," said Gaudissart, "but not habitable on account of the people. You get into duels every day. Why, it is not three months since I fought one just there," pointing to the bridge of La Cise, "with a damned dyer; but I made an end of him, — he bit the dust!"

A PASSION IN THE DESERT.

[SCENES FROM MILITARY LIFE.]

A PASSION IN THE DESERT.

"The sight was fearful!" she exclaimed, as we left the menagerie of Monsieur Martin.

She had been watching that daring speculator as he went through his wonderful performance in the den of the hyena.

"How is it possible," she continued, "to tame those animals so as to be certain that he can trust them?"

"You think it a problem," I answered, interrupting her, "and yet it is a natural fact."

"Oh!" she cried, an incredulous smile flickering on her lip.

"Do you think that beasts are devoid of passions?" I asked. "Let me assure you that we teach them all the vices and virtues of our own state of civilization."

She looked at me in amazement.

"The first time I saw Monsieur Martin," I added, "I exclaimed, as you do, with surprise. I happened to be sitting beside an old soldier whose right leg was amputated, and whose appearance had attracted my notice as I entered the building. His face, stamped with the scars of battle, wore the undaunted look of a veteran of the wars of Napoleon. Moreover, the old hero had a frank and joyous manner which attracts me wherever I meet it. He was, doubtless, one of those old campaigners whom nothing can surprise, who find something to laugh at in the last contortions of a comrade, and will bury a friend

or rifle his body gayly; challenging bullets with indifference; making short shrift for themselves or others; and fraternizing, as a usual thing, with the devil. After looking very attentively at the proprietor of the menagerie as he entered the den, my companion curled his lip with that expression of satirical contempt which well-informed men sometimes put on to mark the difference between themselves and dupes. As I uttered my exclamation of surprise at the coolness and courage of Monsieur Martin, the old soldier smiled, shook his head, and said with a knowing glance, 'An old story!'

"'How do you mean, an old story?' I asked. 'If you could explain the secret of this mysterious power, I should be greatly obliged to you.'

"After a while, during which we became better acquainted, we went to dine at the first restaurant we could find after leaving the menagerie. A bottle of champagne with our dessert brightened the recollections of the old man and made them singularly vivid. He related to me a circumstance in his early history which proved that he had ample cause to pronounce Monsieur Martin's performance 'an old story.'"

When we reached her house, she was so persuasive and captivating, and made me so many pretty promises, that I consented to write down for her benefit the story told me by the old hero. On the following day I sent her this episode of an historical epic, which might be entitled, "The French in Egypt."

At the time of General Desaix's expedition to Upper Egypt a Provençal soldier, who had fallen into the hands

of the Maugrabins, was marched by those tireless Arabs across the desert which lies beyond the cataracts of the Nile. To put sufficient distance between themselves and the French army and thus insure their safety, the Maugrabins made a forced march, and did not halt until after nightfall. They then camped about a well shaded with palm-trees, near which they had previously buried a stock of provisions. Not dreaming that the thought of escape could enter their captive's mind, they merely bound his wrists, and lay down to sleep themselves, after eating a few dates and giving their horses a feed of barley. When the bold Provençal saw his enemies too soundly asleep to watch him, he used his teeth to pick up a scimitar, with which, steadying the blade by means of his knees, he contrived to cut through the cord which bound his hands, and thus recovered his liberty. He at once seized a carbine and a poniard, took the precaution to lay in a supply of dates, a small bag of barley, some powder and ball, buckled on the scimitar, mounted one of the horses, and spurred him in the direction where he supposed the French army to be. Impatient to meet the outposts, he pressed the horse, which was already wearied, so severely that the poor animal fell dead with his flanks torn, leaving the Frenchman alone in the midst of the desert.

After marching for a long time through the sand with the dogged courage of an escaping galley-slave, the soldier was forced to halt as the darkness drew on; for his utter weariness compelled him to rest, though the exquisite sky of an Eastern night might well have tempted him to continue the journey. Happily he had reached a slight elevation, at the top of which a few palm-trees

shot upward, whose leafage, seen from a long distance against the sky, had helped to sustain his hopes. His fatigue was so great that he threw himself down on a block of granite, cut by Nature into the shape of a camp-bed, and slept heavily, without taking the least precaution to protect himself while asleep. He accepted the loss of his life as inevitable, and his last waking thought was one of regret for having left the Maugrabins, whose nomad life began to charm him now that he was far away from them and from every other hope of succor.

He was wakened by the sun, whose pitiless beams falling vertically upon the granite rock produced an intolerable heat. The Provençal had ignorantly flung himself down in a contrary direction to the shadows thrown by the verdant and majestic fronds of the palm-trees. He gazed at these solitary monarchs and shuddered. They recalled to his mind the graceful shafts crowned with long weaving leaves which distinguish the Saracenic columns of the cathedral of Arles. The thought overcame him, and when, after counting the trees, he threw his eyes upon the scene around him, an agony of despair convulsed his soul. He saw a limitless ocean. The sombre sands of the desert stretched out till lost to sight in all directions; they glittered with dark lustre like a steel blade shining in the sun. He could not tell if it were an ocean or a chain of lakes that lay mirrored before him. A hot vapor swept in waves above the surface of this heaving continent. The sky had the Oriental glow of translucent purity which disappoints because it leaves nothing for the imagination to desire. The heavens and the earth were both on fire. Silence

added its awful and desolate majesty. Infinitude, immensity pressed down upon the soul on every side; not a cloud in the sky, not a breath in the air, not a rift on the breast of the sand, which was ruffled only with little ridges scarcely rising above its surface. Far as the eye could reach the horizon fell away into space, marked by a slender line, slim as the edge of a sabre, — like as in summer seas a thread of light parts this earth from the heaven it meets.

The Provençal clasped the trunk of a palm-tree as if it were the body of a friend. Sheltered from the sun by its straight and slender shadow, he wept; and presently sitting down he remained motionless, contemplating with awful dread the implacable nature stretched out before him. He cried aloud, as if to tempt the solitude to answer him. His voice, lost in the hollows of the hillock, sounded afar with a thin resonance that returned no echo; the echo came from the soldier's heart. He was twenty-two years old, and he loaded his carbine.

"Time enough!" he muttered, as he put the liberating weapon on the sand beneath him.

Gazing by turns at the burnished blackness of the sand and the blue expanse of the sky, the soldier dreamed of France. He smelt in fancy the gutters of Paris; he remembered the towns through which he had passed, the faces of his comrades, and the most trifling incidents of his life. His southern imagination saw the pebbles of his own Provence in the undulating play of the heated air, as it seemed to roughen the far-reaching surface of the desert. Dreading the dangers of this cruel mirage, he went down the little hill on the side

opposite to that by which he had gone up the night before. His joy was great when he discovered a natural grotto, formed by the immense blocks of granite which made a foundation for the rising ground. The remnants of a mat showed that the place had once been inhabited, and close to the entrance were a few palm-trees loaded with fruit. The instinct which binds men to life woke in his heart. He now hoped to live until some Maugrabin should pass that way; possibly he might even hear the roar of cannon, for Bonaparte was at that time overrunning Egypt. Encouraged by these thoughts, the Frenchman shook down a cluster of the ripe fruit under the weight of which the palms were bending; and as he tasted this unhoped-for manna, he thanked the former inhabitant of the grotto for the cultivation of the trees, which the rich and luscious flesh of the fruit amply attested. Like a true Provençal, he passed from the gloom of despair to a joy that was half insane. He ran back to the top of the hill, and busied himself for the rest of the day in cutting down one of the sterile trees which had been his shelter the night before.

Some vague recollection made him think of the wild beasts of the desert, and foreseeing that they would come to drink at a spring which bubbled through the sand at the foot of the rock, he resolved to protect his hermitage by felling a tree across the entrance. Notwithstanding his eagerness, and the strength which the fear of being attacked while asleep gave to his muscles, he was unable to cut the palm-tree in pieces during the day; but he succeeded in bringing it down. Towards evening the king of the desert fell; and the noise of his fall, echoing far, was like a moan from the breast of

Solitude. The soldier shuddered, as though he had heard a voice predicting evil. But, like an heir who does not long mourn a parent, he stripped from the beautiful tree the arching green fronds — its poetical adornment — and made a bed of them in his refuge. Then, tired with his work and by the heat of the day, he fell asleep beneath the red vault of the grotto.

In the middle of the night his sleep was broken by a strange noise. He sat up; the deep silence that reigned everywhere enabled him to hear the alternating rhythm of a respiration whose savage vigor could not belong to a human being. A terrible fear, increased by the darkness, by the silence, by the rush of his waking fancies, numbed his heart. He felt the contraction of his hair, which rose on end as his eyes, dilating to their full strength, beheld through the darkness two faint amber lights. At first he thought them an optical delusion; but by degrees the clearness of the night enabled him to distinguish objects in the grotto, and he saw, within two feet of him, an enormous animal lying at rest.

Was it a lion? Was it a tiger? Was it a crocodile? The Provençal had not enough education to know in what sub-species he ought to class the intruder; but his terror was all the greater because his ignorance made it vague. He endured the cruel trial of listening, of striving to catch the peculiarities of this breathing without losing one of its inflections, and without daring to make the slightest movement. A strong odor, like that exhaled by foxes, only far more pungent and penetrating, filled the grotto. When the soldier had tasted it, so to speak, by the nose, his fear became terror; he could no longer doubt the nature of the terrible companion whose

royal lair he had taken for a bivouac. Before long, the reflection of the moon, as it sank to the horizon, lighted up the den and gleamed upon the shining, spotted skin of a panther.

The lion of Egypt lay asleep, curled up like a dog, the peaceable possessor of a kennel at the gate of a mansion; its eyes, which had opened for a moment, were now closed; its head was turned towards the Frenchman. A hundred conflicting thoughts rushed through the mind of the panther's prisoner. Should he kill it with a shot from his musket? But ere the thought was formed, he saw there was no room to take aim; the muzzle would have gone beyond the animal. Suppose he were to wake it? The fear kept him motionless. As he heard the beating of his heart through the dead silence, he cursed the strong pulsations of his vigorous blood, lest they should disturb the sleep which gave him time to think and plan for safety. Twice he put his hand on his scimitar, with the idea of striking off the head of his enemy; but the difficulty of cutting through the close-haired skin made him renounce the bold attempt. Suppose he missed his aim? It would, he knew, be certain death. He preferred the chances of a struggle, and resolved to await the dawn. It was not long in coming. As daylight broke, the Frenchman was able to examine the animal. Its muzzle was stained with blood. "It has eaten a good meal," thought he, not caring whether the feast were human flesh or not; "it will not be hungry when it wakes."

It was a female. The fur on the belly and on the thighs was of sparkling whiteness. Several little spots like velvet made pretty bracelets round her paws. The

muscular tail was also white, but it terminated with black rings. The fur of the back, yellow as dead gold and very soft and glossy, bore the characteristic spots, shaded like a full-blown rose, which distinguish the panther from all other species of *felis*. This terrible hostess lay tranquilly snoring, in an attitude as easy and graceful as that of a cat on the cushions of an ottoman. Her bloody paws, sinewy and well-armed, were stretched beyond her head, which lay upon them; and from her muzzle projected a few straight hairs called whiskers, which shimmered in the early light like silver wires. If he had seen her lying thus imprisoned in a cage, the Provençal would have admired the creature's grace, and the strong contrasts of vivid color which gave to her robe an imperial splendor; but as it was, his sight was jaundiced by sinister forebodings. The presence of the panther, though she was still asleep, had the same effect upon his mind as the magnetic eyes of a snake produce, we are told, upon the nightingale. The soldier's courage oozed away in presence of this silent peril, though he was a man who gathered nerve before the mouths of cannon belching grape-shot. And yet, ere long, a bold thought entered his mind, and checked the cold sweat which was rolling from his brow. Roused to action, as some men are when, driven face to face with death, they defy it and offer themselves to their doom, he saw a tragedy before him, and he resolved to play his part with honor to the last.

"Yesterday," he said, "the Arabs might have killed me."

Regarding himself as dead, he waited bravely, but with anxious curiosity, for the waking of his enemy.

When the sun rose, the panther suddenly opened her eyes; then she stretched her paws violently, as if to unlimber them from the cramp of their position. Presently she yawned and showed the frightful armament of her teeth, and her cloven tongue, rough as a grater.

"She is like a dainty woman," thought the Frenchman, watching her as she rolled and turned on her side with an easy and coquettish movement. She licked the blood from her paws, and rubbed her head with a reiterated movement full of grace.

"Well done! dress yourself prettily, my little woman," said the Frenchman, who recovered his gayety as soon as he had recovered his courage. "We are going to bid each other good-morning;" and he felt for the short poniard which he had taken from the Maugrabins.

At this instant the panther turned her head towards the Frenchman and looked at him fixedly, without moving. The rigidity of her metallic eyes and their insupportable clearness made the Provençal shudder. The beast moved towards him; he looked at her caressingly, with a soothing glance by which he hoped to magnetize her. He let her come quite close to him before he stirred; then, with a touch as gentle and loving as he might have used to a pretty woman, he slid his hand along her spine from the head to the flanks, scratching with his nails the flexible vertebræ which divide the yellow back of a panther. The creature drew up her tail voluptuously, her eyes softened, and when for the third time the Frenchman bestowed this self-interested caress, she gave vent to a purr like that with which a cat expresses pleasure; but it issued from a throat so deep and powerful that the sound echoed through the

grotto like the last chords of an organ rolling along the roof of a church. The Provençal, perceiving the value of his caresses, redoubled them, until they had completely soothed and lulled the imperious courtesan.

When he felt that he had subdued the ferocity of his capricious companion, whose hunger had so fortunately been appeased the night before, he rose to leave the grotto. The panther let him go; but as soon as he reached the top of the little hill she bounded after him with the lightness of a bird hopping from branch to branch, and rubbed against his legs, arching her back with the gesture of a domestic cat. Then looking at her guest with an eye that was growing less inflexible, she uttered the savage cry which naturalists liken to the noise of a saw.

"My lady is exacting," cried the Frenchman, smiling. He began to play with her ears and stroke her belly, and at last he scratched her head firmly with his nails. Encouraged by success, he tickled her skull with the point of his dagger, looking for the right spot where to stab her; but the hardness of the bone made him pause, dreading failure.

The sultana of the desert acknowledged the talents of her slave by lifting her head and swaying her neck to his caresses, betraying satisfaction by the tranquillity of her relaxed attitude. The Frenchman suddenly perceived that he could assassinate the fierce princess at a blow, if he struck her in the throat; and he had raised the weapon, when the panther, surfeited perhaps with his caresses, threw herself gracefully at his feet, glancing up at him with a look in which, despite her natural ferocity, a flicker of kindness could be seen. The poor

Provençal, frustrated for the moment, ate his dates as he leaned against a palm-tree, casting from time to time an interrogating eye across the desert in the hope of discerning rescue from afar, and then lowering it upon his terrible companion, to watch the chances of her uncertain clemency. Each time that he threw away a date-stone the panther eyed the spot where it fell with an expression of keen distrust; and she examined the Frenchman with what might be called commercial prudence. The examination, however, seemed favorable, for when the man had finished his meagre meal she licked his shoes and wiped off the dust, which was caked into the folds of the leather, with her rough and powerful tongue.

"How will it be when she is hungry?" thought the Provençal. In spite of the shudder which this reflection cost him, his attention was attracted by the symmetrical proportions of the animal, and he began to measure them with his eye. She was three feet in height to the shoulder, and four feet long, not including the tail. That powerful weapon, which was round as a club, measured three feet. The head, as large as that of a lioness, was remarkable for an expression of crafty intelligence; the cold cruelty of a tiger was its ruling trait, and yet it bore a vague resemblance to the face of an artful woman. As the soldier watched her, the countenance of this solitary queen shone with savage gayety like that of Nero in his cups: she had slaked her thirst for blood, and now wished for play. The Frenchman tried to come and go, and accustom her to his movements. The panther left him free, as if contented to follow him with her eyes, seeming, however, less like a faithful dog watching

his master's movements with affection, than a huge Angora cat uneasy and suspicious of them. A few steps brought him to the spring, where he saw the carcass of his horse, which the panther had evidently carried there. Only two thirds was eaten. The sight reassured the Frenchman; for it explained the absence of his terrible companion and the forbearance which she had shown to him while asleep.

This first good luck encouraged the reckless soldier as he thought of the future. The wild idea of making a home with the panther until some chance of escape occurred entered his mind, and he resolved to try every means of taming her and of turning her good-will to account. With these thoughts he returned to her side, and noticed joyfully that she moved her tail with an almost imperceptible motion. He sat down beside her fearlessly, and they began to play with each other. He held her paws and her muzzle, twisted her ears, threw her over on her back, and stroked her soft, warm flanks. She allowed him to do so; and when he began to smooth the fur of her paws, she carefully drew in her murderous claws, which were sharp and curved like a Damascus blade. The Frenchman kept one hand on his dagger, again watching his opportunity to plunge it into the belly of the too-confiding beast; but the fear that she might strangle him in her last convulsions once more stayed his hand. Moreover, he felt in his heart a foreboding of remorse which warned him not to destroy a hitherto inoffensive creature. He even fancied that he had found a friend in the limitless desert. His mind turned back, involuntarily, to his first mistress, whom he had named in derision "Mignonne," because

her jealousy was so furious that throughout the whole period of their intercourse he lived in dread of the knife with which she threatened him. This recollection of his youth suggested the idea of teaching the young panther, whose soft agility and grace he now admired with less terror, to answer to the caressing name. Towards evening he had grown so familiar with his perilous position that he was half in love with its dangers, and his companion was so far tamed that she had caught the habit of turning to him when he called, in falsetto tones, "Mignonne!"

As the sun went down Mignonne uttered at intervals a prolonged, deep, melancholy cry.

"She is well brought up," thought the gay soldier. "She says her prayers." But the jest only came into his mind as he watched the peaceful attitude of his comrade.

"Come, my pretty blonde, I will let you go to bed first," he said, relying on the activity of his legs to get away as soon as she fell asleep, and trusting to find some other resting-place for the night. He waited anxiously for the right moment, and when it came he started vigorously in the direction of the Nile. But he had scarcely marched for half an hour through the sand before he heard the panther bounding after him, giving at intervals the saw-like cry which was more terrible to hear than the thud of her bounds.

"Well, well!" he cried, "she must have fallen in love with me! Perhaps she has never met any one else. It is flattering to be her first love."

So thinking, he fell into one of the treacherous quicksands which deceive the inexperienced traveller in the

desert, and from which there is seldom any escape. He felt he was sinking, and he uttered a cry of despair. The panther seized him by the collar with her teeth, and sprang vigorously backward, drawing him, like magic, from the sucking sand.

"Ah, Mignonne!" cried the soldier, kissing her with enthusiasm, "we belong to each other now,—for life, for death! But play me no tricks," he added, as he turned back the way he came.

From that moment the desert was, as it were, peopled for him. It held a being to whom he could talk, and whose ferocity was now lulled into gentleness, although he could scarcely explain to himself the reasons for this extraordinary friendship. His anxiety to keep awake and on his guard succumbed to excessive weariness both of body and mind, and throwing himself down on the floor of the grotto he slept soundly. At his waking Mignonne was gone. He mounted the little hill to scan the horizon, and perceived her in the far distance returning with the long bounds peculiar to these animals, who are prevented from running by the extreme flexibility of their spinal column.

Mignonne came home with bloody jaws, and received the tribute of caresses which her slave hastened to pay, all the while manifesting her pleasure by reiterated purring.

Her eyes, now soft and gentle, rested kindly on the Provençal, who spoke to her lovingly as he would to a domestic animal.

"Ah! Mademoiselle,—for you are an honest girl, are you not? You like to be petted, don't you? Are you not ashamed of yourself? You have been eating a Maugrabin. Well, well! they are animals like the rest

of you. But you are not to craunch up a Frenchman; remember that! If you do, I will not love you."

She played like a young dog with her master, and let him roll her over and pat and stroke her, and sometimes she would coax him to play by laying a paw upon his knee with a pretty soliciting gesture.

Several days passed rapidly. This strange companionship revealed to the Provençal the sublime beauties of the desert. The alternations of hope and fear, the sufficiency of food, the presence of a creature who occupied his thoughts,— all this kept his mind alert, yet free: it was a life full of strange contrasts. Solitude revealed to him her secrets, and wrapped him with her charm. In the rising and the setting of the sun he saw splendors unknown to the world of men. He quivered as he listened to the soft whirring of the wings of a bird,— rare visitant! — or watched the blending of the fleeting clouds,— those changeful and many-tinted voyagers. In the waking hours of the night he studied the play of the moon upon the sandy ocean, where the strong simoom had rippled the surface into waves and ever-varying undulations. He lived in the Eastern day; he worshipped its marvellous glory. He rejoiced in the grandeur of the storms when they rolled across the vast plain, and tossed the sand upward till it looked like a dry red fog or a solid death-dealing vapor; and as the night came on he welcomed it with ecstasy, grateful for the blessed coolness of the light of the stars. His ears listened to the music of the skies. Solitude taught him the treasures of meditation. He spent hours in recalling trifles, and in comparing his past life with the weird present.

He grew fondly attached to his panther; for he was a man who needed an affection. Whether it were that his own will, magnetically strong, had modified the nature of his savage princess, or that the wars then raging in the desert had provided her with an ample supply of food, it is certain that she showed no sign of attacking him, and became so tame that he soon felt no fear of her. He spent much of his time in sleeping; though with his mind awake, like a spider in its web, lest he should miss some deliverance that might chance to cross the sandy sphere marked out by the horizon. He had made his shirt into a banner and tied it to the top of a palm-tree which he had stripped of its leafage. Taking counsel of necessity, he kept the flag extended by fastening the corners with twigs and wedges; for the fitful wind might have failed to wave it at the moment when the longed-for succor came in sight.

Nevertheless, there were long hours of gloom when hope forsook him; and then he played with his panther. He learned to know the different inflections of her voice and the meanings of her expressive glance; he studied the variegation of the spots which shaded the dead gold of her robe. Mignonne no longer growled when he caught the tuft of her dangerous tail and counted the black and white rings which glittered in the sunlight like a cluster of precious stones. He delighted in the soft lines of her lithe body, the whiteness of her belly, the grace of her charming head: but above all he loved to watch her as she gambolled at play. The agility and youthfulness of her movements were a constantly fresh surprise to him. He admired the suppleness of

the flexible body as she bounded, crept, and glided, or clung to the trunk of palm-trees, or rolled over and over, crouching sometimes to the ground, and gathering herself together as she made ready for her vigorous spring. Yet, however vigorous the bound, however slippery the granite block on which she landed, she would stop short, motionless, at the one word "Mignonne."

One day, under a dazzling sun, a large bird hovered in the sky. The Provençal left his panther to watch the new guest. After a moment's pause the neglected sultana uttered a low growl.

"The devil take me! I believe she is jealous!" exclaimed the soldier, observing the rigid look which once more appeared in her metallic eyes. "The soul of Sophronie has got into her body!"

The eagle disappeared in ether, and the Frenchman, recalled by the panther's displeasure, admired afresh her rounded flanks and the perfect grace of her attitude. She was as pretty as a woman. The blonde brightness of her robe shaded, with delicate gradations, to the dead-white tones of her furry thighs; the vivid sunshine brought out the brilliancy of this living gold and its variegated brown spots with indescribable lustre. The panther and the Provençal gazed at each other with human comprehension. She trembled with delight — the coquettish creature! — as she felt the nails of her friend scratching the strong bones of her skull. Her eyes glittered like flashes of lightning, and then she closed them tightly.

"She has a soul!" cried the soldier, watching the tranquil repose of this sovereign of the desert, golden

as the sands, white as their pulsing light, solitary and burning as they.

"Well," she said, "I have read your defence of the beasts. But tell me what was the end of this friendship between two beings so formed to understand each other."

"Ah, exactly," I replied. "It ended as all great passions end, — by a misunderstanding. Both sides imagine treachery, pride prevents an explanation, and the rupture comes about through obstinacy."

"Yes," she said, "and sometimes a word, a look, an exclamation suffices. But tell me the end of the story."

"That is difficult," I answered. "But I will give it to you in the words of the old veteran, as he finished the bottle of champagne and exclaimed: 'I don't know how I could have hurt her, but she suddenly turned upon me as if in fury, and seized my thigh with her sharp teeth; and yet (as I afterwards remembered) not cruelly. I thought she meant to devour me, and I plunged my dagger into her throat. She rolled over with a cry that froze my soul; she looked at me in her death-struggle, but without anger. I would have given all the world — my cross, which I had not then gained, all, everything — to have brought her back to life. It was as if I had murdered a friend, a human being. When the soldiers who saw my flag came to my rescue they found me weeping. Monsieur,' he resumed, after a moment's silence, 'I went through the wars in Germany, Spain, Russia, France; I have marched my carcass wellnigh over all the world; but I have seen

nothing comparable to the desert. Ah, it is grand! glorious!'

"'What were your feelings there?' I asked.

"'They cannot be told, young man. Besides, I do not always regret my panther and my palm-tree oasis: I must be very sad for that. But I will tell you this: in the desert there is all — and yet nothing.'

"'Stay! — explain that.'

"'Well, then,' he said, with a gesture of impatience, 'God is there, and man is not.'"

THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE.

[PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES.]

THE HIDDEN MASTERPIECE.

I.

On a cold morning in December, towards the close of the year 1612, a young man, whose clothing betrayed his poverty, was standing before the door of a house in the Rue des Grands-Augustins, in Paris. After walking to and fro for some time with the hesitation of a lover who fears to approach his mistress, however complying she may be, he ended by crossing the threshold and asking if Maître François Porbus were within. At the affirmative answer of an old woman who was sweeping out one of the lower rooms the young man slowly mounted the stairway, stopping from time to time and hesitating, like a newly fledged courtier doubtful as to what sort of reception the king might grant him.

When he reached the upper landing of the spiral ascent, he paused a moment before laying hold of a grotesque knocker which ornamented the door of the *atelier* where the famous painter of Henry IV. — neglected by Marie de Medicis for Rubens — was probably at work. The young man felt the strong sensation which vibrates in the soul of great artists when, in the flush of youth and of their ardor for art, they approach a man of genius or a masterpiece. In all human sentiments there are, as it were, primeval flowers bred of noble enthusiasms,

which droop and fade from year to year, till joy is but a memory and glory a lie. Amid such fleeting emotions nothing so resembles love as the young passion of an artist who tastes the first delicious anguish of his destined fame and woe, — a passion daring yet timid, full of vague confidence and sure discouragement. Is there a man, slender in fortune, rich in his spring-time of genius, whose heart has not beaten loudly as he approached a master of his art? If there be, that man will forever lack some heart-string, some touch, I know not what, of his brush, some fibre in his creations, some sentiment in his poetry. When braggarts, self-satisfied and in love with themselves, step early into the fame which belongs rightly to their future achievements, they are men of genius only in the eyes of fools. If talent is to be measured by youthful shyness, by that indefinable modesty which men born to glory lose in the practice of their art, as a pretty woman loses hers among the artifices of coquetry, then this unknown young man might claim to be possessed of genuine merit. The habit of success lessens doubt; and modesty, perhaps, is doubt.

Worn down with poverty and discouragement, and dismayed at this moment by his own presumption, the young neophyte might not have dared to enter the presence of the master to whom we owe our admirable portrait of Henry IV., if chance had not thrown an unexpected assistance in his way. An old man mounted the spiral stairway. The oddity of his dress, the magnificence of his lace ruffles, the solid assurance of his deliberate step, led the youth to assume that this remarkable personage must be the patron, or at least the intimate friend, of the painter. He drew back into a corner of the landing and

made room for the new-comer; looking at him attentively and hoping to find either the frank good-nature of the artistic temperament, or the serviceable disposition of those who promote the arts. But on the contrary he fancied he saw something diabolical in the expression of the old man's face, —something, I know not what, which has the quality of alluring the artistic mind.

Imagine a bald head, the brow full and prominent and falling with deep projection over a little flattened nose turned up at the end like the noses of Rabelais and Socrates; a laughing, wrinkled mouth; a short chin boldly chiselled and garnished with a gray beard cut into a point; sea-green eyes, faded perhaps by age, but whose pupils, contrasting with the pearl-white balls on which they floated, cast at times magnetic glances of anger or enthusiasm. The face in other respects was singularly withered and worn by the weariness of old age, and still more, it would seem, by the action of thoughts which had undermined both soul and body. The eyes had lost their lashes, and the eyebrows were scarcely traced along the projecting arches where they belonged. Imagine such a head upon a lean and feeble body, surround it with lace of dazzling whiteness worked in meshes like a fish-slice, festoon the black velvet doublet of the old man with a heavy gold chain, and you will have a faint idea of the exterior of this strange individual, to whose appearance the dusky light of the landing lent fantastic coloring. You might have thought that a canvas of Rembrandt without its frame had walked silently up the stairway, bringing with it the dark atmosphere which was the sign-manual of the great master. The old man cast a look upon the youth which was full

of sagacity; then he rapped three times upon the door, and said, when it was opened by a man in feeble health, apparently about forty years of age, "Good-morning, maître."

Porbus bowed respectfully, and made way for his guest, allowing the youth to pass in at the same time, under the impression that he came with the old man, and taking no further notice of him; all the less perhaps because the neophyte stood still beneath the spell which holds a heaven-born painter as he sees for the first time an *atelier* filled with the materials and instruments of his art. Daylight came from a casement in the roof and fell, focussed as it were, upon a canvas which rested on an easel in the middle of the room, and which bore, as yet, only three or four chalk lines. The light thus concentrated did not reach the dark angles of the vast *atelier;* but a few wandering reflections gleamed through the russet shadows on the silvered breastplate of a horseman's cuirass of the fourteenth century as it hung from the wall, or sent sharp lines of light upon the carved and polished cornice of a dresser which held specimens of rare pottery and porcelains, or touched with sparkling points the rough-grained texture of ancient gold-brocaded curtains, flung in broad folds about the room to serve the painter as models for his drapery. Anatomical casts in plaster, fragments and torsos of antique goddesses amorously polished by the kisses of centuries, jostled each other upon shelves and brackets. Innumerable sketches, studies in the three crayons, in ink, and in red chalk covered the walls from floor to ceiling; color-boxes, bottles of oil and turpentine, easels and stools upset or standing at right angles, left but a narrow pathway to the circle of

light thrown from the window in the roof, which fell full on the pale face of Porbus and on the ivory skull of his singular visitor.

The attention of the young man was taken exclusively by a picture destined to become famous after those days of tumult and revolution, and which even then was precious in the sight of certain opinionated individuals to whom we owe the preservation of the divine afflatus through the dark days when the life of art was in jeopardy. This noble picture represents the Mary of Egypt as she prepares to pay for her passage by the ship. It is a masterpiece, painted for Marie de Medicis, and afterwards sold by her in the days of her distress.

"I like your saint," said the old man to Porbus, "and I will give you ten golden crowns over and above the queen's offer; but as to entering into competition with her — the devil!"

"You do like her, then?"

"As for that," said the old man, "yes, and no. The good woman is well set-up, but — she is not living. You young men think you have done all when you have drawn the form correctly, and put everything in place according to the laws of anatomy. You color the features with flesh-tones, — mixed beforehand on your palette, — taking very good care to shade one side of the face darker than the other; and because you draw now and then from a nude woman standing on a table, you think you can copy nature; you fancy yourselves painters, and imagine that you have got at the secret of God's creations! Pr-r-r-r! — To be a great poet it is not enough to know the rules of syntax and write

faultless grammar. Look at your saint, Porbus. At first sight she is admirable; but at the very next glance we perceive that she is glued to the canvas, and that we cannot walk round her. She is a silhouette with only one side, a semblance cut in outline, an image that can't turn round nor change her position. I feel no air between this arm and the background of the picture; space and depth are wanting. All is in good perspective; the atmospheric gradations are carefully observed, and yet in spite of your conscientious labor I cannot believe that this beautiful body has the warm breath of life. If I put my hand on that firm, round throat I shall find it cold as marble. No, no, my friend, blood does not run beneath that ivory skin; the purple tide of life does not swell those veins, nor stir those fibres which interlace like net-work below the translucent amber of the brow and breast. This part palpitates with life, but that other part is not living; life and death jostle each other in every detail. Here, you have a woman; there, a statue; here again, a dead body. Your creation is incomplete. You have breathed only a part of your soul into the well-beloved work. The torch of Prometheus went out in your hands over and over again; there are several parts of your painting on which the celestial flame never shone."

"But why is it so, my dear master?" said Porbus humbly, while the young man could hardly restrain a strong desire to strike the critic.

"Ah! that is the question," said the little old man. "You are floating between two systems, — between drawing and color, between the patient phlegm and honest stiffness of the old Dutch masters and the dazzling

warmth and abounding joy of the Italians. You have tried to follow, at one and the same time, Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Dürer and Paul Veronese. Well, well! it was a glorious ambition, but what is the result? You have neither the stern attraction of severity nor the deceptive magic of the chiaroscuro. See! at this place the rich, clear color of Titian has forced out the skeleton outline of Albrecht Dürer, as molten bronze might burst and overflow a slender mould. Here and there the outline has resisted the flood, and holds back the magnificent torrent of Venetian color. Your figure is neither perfectly well painted nor perfectly well drawn; it bears throughout the signs of this unfortunate indecision. If you did not feel that the fire of your genius was hot enough to weld into one the rival methods, you ought to have chosen honestly the one or the other, and thus attained the unity which conveys one aspect, at least, of life. As it is, you are true only on your middle plane. Your outlines are false; they do not round upon themselves; they suggest nothing behind them. There is truth here," said the old man, pointing to the bosom of the saint; "and here," showing the spot where the shoulder ended against the background; "but there," he added, returning to the throat, "it is all false. Do not inquire into the why and wherefore. I should fill you with despair."

The old man sat down on a stool and held his head in his hands for some minutes in silence.

"Master," said Porbus at length, "I studied that throat from the nude; but, to our sorrow, there are effects in nature which become false or impossible when placed on canvas."

"The mission of art is not to copy nature, but to represent it. You are not an abject copyist, but a poet," cried the old man, hastily interrupting Porbus with a despotic gesture. "If it were not so, a sculptor could reach the height of his art by merely moulding a woman. Try to mould the hand of your mistress, and see what you will get, — ghastly articulations, without the slightest resemblance to her living hand; you must have recourse to the chisel of a man who, without servilely copying that hand, can give it movement and life. It is our mission to seize the mind, soul, countenance of things and beings. Effects! effects! what are they? the mere accidents of the life, and not the life itself. A hand, — since I have taken that as an example, — a hand is not merely a part of the body, it is far more; it expresses and carries on a thought which we must seize and render. Neither the painter nor the poet nor the sculptor should separate the effect from the cause, for they are indissolubly one. The true struggle of art lies there. Many a painter has triumphed through instinct without knowing this theory of art as a theory.

"Yes," continued the old man vehemently, "you draw a woman, but you do not *see* her. That is not the way to force an entrance into the arcana of Nature. Your hand reproduces, without an action of your mind, the model you copied under a master. You do not search out the secrets of form, nor follow its windings and evolutions with enough love and perseverance. Beauty is solemn and severe, and cannot be attained in that way: we must wait and watch its times and seasons, and clasp and hold it firmly ere it yields to us.

Form is a Proteus less easily captured, more skilful to double and escape, than the Proteus of fable; it is only at the cost of struggle that we compel it to come forth in its true aspects. You young men are content with the first glimpse you get of it; or, at any rate, with the second or the third. This is not the spirit of the great warriors of art, — invincible powers, not misled by will-o'-the-wisps, but advancing always until they force Nature to lie bare in her divine integrity. That was Raphael's method," said the old man, lifting his velvet cap in homage to the sovereign of art; "his superiority came from the inward essence which seems to break from the inner to the outer of his figures. Form with him was what it is with us, — a medium by which to communicate ideas, sensations, feelings; in short, the infinite poesy of being. Every figure is a world; a portrait, whose original stands forth like a sublime vision, colored with the rainbow tints of light, drawn by the monitions of an inward voice, laid bare by a divine finger which points to the past of its whole existence as the source of its given expression. You clothe your women with delicate skins and glorious draperies of hair, but where is the blood which begets the passion or the peace of their souls, and is the cause of what you call 'effects'? Your saint is a dark woman; but this, my poor Porbus, belongs to a fair one. Your figures are pale, colored phantoms, which you present to our eyes; and you call that painting! art! Because you make something which looks more like a woman than a house, you think you have touched the goal; proud of not being obliged to write *currus venustus* or *pulcher homo* on the frame of your picture, you think yourselves majestic

artists like our great forefathers. Ha, ha! you have not got there yet, my little men; you will use up many a crayon and spoil many a canvas before you reach that height. Undoubtedly a woman carries her head this way and her petticoats that way; her eyes soften and droop with just that look of resigned gentleness; the throbbing shadow of the eyelashes falls exactly thus upon her cheek. That is it, and — that is *not it*. What lacks? A mere nothing; but that mere nothing is ALL. You have given the shadow of life, but you have not given its fulness, its being, its — I know not what — soul, perhaps, which floats vaporously about the tabernacle of flesh; in short, that flower of life which Raphael and Titian culled. Start from the point you have now attained, and perhaps you may yet paint a worthy picture: you grew weary too soon. Mediocrity will extol your work; but the true artist smiles. O Mabuse! O my master!" added this singular person, "you were a thief; you have robbed us of your life, your knowledge, your art! But at least," he resumed after a pause, "this picture is better than the paintings of that rascally Rubens, with his mountains of Flemish flesh daubed with vermilion, his cascades of red hair, and his hurly-burly of color. At any rate, you have got the elements of color, drawing, and sentiment, — the three essential parts of art."

"But the saint is sublime, good sir!" cried the young man in a loud voice, waking from a deep revery. "These figures, the saint and the boatman, have a subtile meaning which the Italian painters cannot give. I do not know one of them who could have invented that hesitation of the boatman."

"Does the young fellow belong to you?" asked Porbus of the old man.

"Alas, maître, forgive my boldness," said the neophyte, blushing. "I am all unknown; only a dauber by instinct. I have just come to Paris, that fountain of art and science."

"Let us see what you can do," said Porbus, giving him a red crayon and a piece of paper.

The unknown copied the saint with an easy turn of his hand.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the old man, "what is your name?"

The youth signed the drawing: Nicolas Poussin.

"Not bad for a beginner," said the strange being who had discoursed so wildly. "I see that it is worth while to talk art before you. I don't blame you for admiring Porbus's saint. It is a masterpiece for the world at large; only those who are behind the veil of the holy of holies can perceive its errors. But you are worthy of a lesson, and capable of understanding it. I will show you how little is needed to turn that picture into a true masterpiece. Give all your eyes and all your attention; such a chance of instruction may never fall in your way again. Your palette, Porbus."

Porbus fetched his palette and brushes. The little old man turned up his cuffs with convulsive haste, slipped his thumb through the palette charged with prismatic colors, and snatched, rather than took, the handful of brushes which Porbus held out to him. As he did so his beard, cut to a point, seemed to quiver with the eagerness of an incontinent fancy; and while he filled his brush he muttered between his teeth:—

"Colors fit to fling out of the window with the man who ground them,—crude, false, revolting! who can paint with them?"

Then he dipped the point of his brush with feverish haste into the various tints, running through the whole scale with more rapidity than the organist of a cathedral runs up the gamut of the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin stood motionless on either side of the easel, plunged in passionate contemplation.

"See, young man," said the old man without turning round, "see how with three or four touches and a faint bluish glaze you can make the air circulate round the head of the poor saint, who was suffocating in that thick atmosphere. Look how the drapery now floats, and you see that the breeze lifts it; just now it looked like heavy linen held out by pins. Observe that the satiny lustre I am putting on the bosom gives it the plump suppleness of the flesh of a young girl. See how this tone of mingled reddish-brown and ochre warms up the cold grayness of that large shadow where the blood seemed to stagnate rather than flow. Young man, young man! what I am showing you now no other master in the world can teach you. Mabuse alone knew the secret of giving life to form. Mabuse had but one pupil, and I am he. I never took a pupil, and I am an old man now. You are intelligent enough to guess at what should follow from the little that I shall show you to-day."

While he was speaking, the extraordinary old man was giving touches here and there to all parts of the picture. Here two strokes of the brush, there one, but each so telling that together they brought out a

new painting, — a painting steeped, as it were, in light. He worked with such passionate ardor that the sweat rolled in great drops from his bald brow; and his motions seemed to be jerked out of him with such rapidity and impatience that the young Poussin fancied a demon, incased within the body of this singular being, was working his hands fantastically like those of a puppet without, or even against, the will of their owner. The unnatural brightness of his eyes, the convulsive movements which seemed the result of some mental resistance, gave to this fancy of the youth a semblance of truth which reacted upon his lively imagination. The old man worked on, muttering half to himself, half to his neophyte: —

"Paf! paf! paf! that is how we butter it on, young man. Ah! my little pats, you are right; warm up that icy tone. Come, come! — pon, pon, pon, —" he continued, touching up the spots where he had complained of a lack of life, hiding under layers of color the conflicting methods, and regaining the unity of tone essential to an ardent Egyptian.

"Now see, my little friend, it is only the last touches of the brush that count for anything. Porbus put on a hundred; I have only put on one or two. Nobody will thank us for what is underneath, remember that!"

At last the demon paused; the old man turned to Porbus and Poussin, who stood mute with admiration, and said to them, —

"It is not yet equal to my Beautiful Nut-girl; still, one can put one's name to such a work. Yes, I will sign it," he added, rising to fetch a mirror in which to look at what he had done. "Now let us go and break-

fast. Come, both of you, to my house. I have some smoked ham and good wine. Hey! hey! in spite of the degenerate times we will talk painting; we are strong ourselves. Here is a little man," he continued, striking Nicolas Poussin on the shoulder, "who has the faculty."

Observing the shabby cap of the youth, he pulled from his belt a leathern purse from which he took two gold pieces and offered them to him, saying, —

"I buy your drawing."

"Take them," said Porbus to Poussin, seeing that the latter trembled and blushed with shame, for the young scholar had the pride of poverty; "take them, he has the ransom of two kings in his pouch."

The three left the *atelier* and proceeded, talking all the way of art, to a handsome wooden house standing near the Pont Saint-Michel, whose window-casings and arabesque decoration amazed Poussin. The embryo painter soon found himself in one of the rooms on the ground floor seated, beside a good fire, at a table covered with appetizing dishes, and, by unexpected good fortune, in company with two great artists who treated him with kindly attention.

"Young man," said Porbus, observing that he was speechless, with his eyes fixed on a picture, "do not look at that too long, or you will fall into despair."

It was the Adam of Mabuse, painted by that wayward genius to enable him to get out of the prison where his creditors had kept him so long. The figure presented such fulness and force of reality that Nicolas Poussin began to comprehend the meaning of the bewildering talk of the old man. The latter looked

at the picture with a satisfied but not enthusiastic manner, which seemed to say, "I have done better myself."

"There is life in the form," he remarked. "My poor master surpassed himself there; but observe the want of truth in the background. The man is living, certainly; he rises and is coming towards us; but the atmosphere, the sky, the air that we breathe, see, feel, — where are they? Besides, that is only a man; and the being who came first from the hand of God must needs have had something divine about him which is lacking here. Mabuse said so himself with vexation in his sober moments."

Poussin looked alternately at the old man and at Porbus with uneasy curiosity. He turned to the latter as if to ask the name of their host, but the painter laid a finger on his lips with an air of mystery, and the young man, keenly interested, kept silence, hoping that sooner or later some word of the conversation might enable him to guess the name of the old man, whose wealth and genius were sufficiently attested by the respect which Porbus showed him, and by the marvels of art heaped together in the picturesque apartment.

Poussin, observing against the dark panelling of the wall a magnificent portrait of a woman, exclaimed aloud, "What a beautiful Giorgione!"

"No," remarked the old man, "that is only one of my early daubs."

"Zounds!" cried Poussin naïvely; "are you the king of painters?"

The old man smiled, as if long accustomed to such homage. "Maître Frenhofer," said Porbus, "could

you order up a little of your good Rhine wine for me?"

"Two casks," answered the host; "one to pay for the pleasure of looking at your pretty sinner this morning, and the other as a mark of friendship."

"Ah! if I were not so feeble," resumed Porbus, "and if you would consent to let me see your Beautiful Nut-girl, I too could paint some lofty picture, grand and yet profound, where the forms should have the living life."

"Show my work!" exclaimed the old man, with deep emotion. "No, no! I have still to bring it to perfection. Yesterday, towards evening, I thought it was finished. Her eyes were liquid, her flesh trembled, her tresses waved — she breathed! And yet, though I have grasped the secret of rendering on a flat canvas the relief and roundness of nature, this morning at dawn I saw many errors. Ah! to attain that glorious result, I have studied to their depths the masters of color. I have analyzed and lifted, layer by layer, the colors of Titian, king of light. Like him, great sovereign of art, I have sketched my figure in light clear tones of supple yet solid color; for shadow is but an accident, — remember that, young man. Then I worked backward, as it were; and by means of half-tints, and glazings whose transparency I kept diminishing little by little, I was able to cast strong shadows deepening almost to blackness. The shadows of ordinary painters are not of the same texture as their tones of light. They are wood, brass, iron, anything you please except flesh in shadow. We feel that if the figures changed position the shady places could not be

wiped off, and would remain dark spots which never could be made luminous. I have avoided that blunder, though many of our most illustrious painters have fallen into it. In my work you will see whiteness beneath the opacity of the broadest shadow. Unlike the crowd of ignoramuses, who fancy they draw correctly because they can paint one good vanishing line, I have not dryly outlined my figures, nor brought out superstitiously minute anatomical details; for, let me tell you, the human body does not end off with a line. In that respect sculptors get nearer to the truth of nature than we do. Nature is all curves, each wrapping or overlapping another. To speak rigorously, there is no such thing as drawing. Do not laugh, young man; no matter how strange that saying seems to you, you will understand the reasons for it one of these days. A line is a means by which man explains to himself the effect of light upon a given object; but there is no such thing as a line in nature, where all things are rounded and full. It is only in modelling that we really draw, — in other words, that we detach things from their surroundings and put them in their due relief. The proper distribution of light can alone reveal the whole body. For this reason I do not sharply define lineaments; I diffuse about their outline a haze of warm, light half-tints, so that I defy any one to place a finger on the exact spot where the parts join the groundwork of the picture. If seen near by this sort of work has a woolly effect, and is wanting in nicety and precision; but go a few steps off and the parts fall into place; they take their proper form and detach themselves, — the body turns, the limbs stand out, we feel the air circulating around them.

"Nevertheless," he continued, sadly, "I am not satisfied; there are moments when I have my doubts. Perhaps it would be better not to sketch a single line. I ask myself if I ought not to grasp the figure first by its highest lights, and then work down to the darker portions. Is not that the method of the sun, divine painter of the universe? O Nature, Nature! who has ever caught thee in thy flights? Alas! the heights of knowledge, like the depths of ignorance, lead to unbelief. I doubt my work."

The old man paused, then resumed. "For ten years I have worked, young man; but what are ten short years in the long struggle with Nature? We do not know the time it cost Pygmalion to make the only statue that ever walked —"

He fell into a revery and remained, with fixed eyes, oblivious of all about him, playing mechanically with his knife.

"See, he is talking to his own soul," said Porbus in a low voice.

The words acted like a spell on Nicolas Poussin, filling him with the inexplicable curiosity of a true artist. The strange old man, with his white eyes fixed in stupor, became to the wondering youth something more than a man; he seemed a fantastic spirit inhabiting an unknown sphere, and waking by its touch confused ideas within the soul. We can no more define the moral phenomena of this species of fascination than we can render in words the emotions excited in the heart of an exile by a song which recalls his fatherland. The contempt which the old man affected to pour upon the noblest efforts of art, his wealth, his manners, the respectful deference shown to him by Porbus, his work guarded so secretly,

— a work of patient toil, a work no doubt of genius, judging by the head of the Virgin which Poussin had so naïvely admired, and which, beautiful beside even the Adam of Mabuse, betrayed the imperial touch of a great artist, — in short, everything about the strange old man seemed beyond the limits of human nature. The rich imagination of the youth fastened upon the one perceptible and clear clew to the mystery of this supernatural being, — the presence of the artistic nature, that wild impassioned nature to which such mighty powers have been confided, which too often abuses those powers, and drags cold reason and common souls, and even lovers of art, over stony and arid places, where for such there is neither pleasure nor instruction; while to the artistic soul itself, — that white-winged angel of sportive fancy, — epics, works of art, and visions rise along the way. It is a nature, an essence, mocking yet kind, fruitful though destitute. Thus, for the enthusiastic Poussin, the old man became by sudden transfiguration Art itself, — art with all its secrets, its transports, and its dreams.

"Yes, my dear Porbus," said Frenhofer, speaking half in revery, "I have never yet beheld a perfect woman; a body whose outlines were faultless and whose flesh-tints — Ah! where lives she?" he cried, interrupting his own words; "where lives the lost Venus of the ancients, so long sought for, whose scattered beauty we snatch by glimpses? Oh! to see for a moment, a single moment, the divine completed nature, — the ideal, — I would give my all of fortune. Yes; I would search thee out, celestial Beauty! in thy farthest sphere. Like Orpheus, I would go down to hell to win back the life of art —"

"Let us go," said Porbus to Poussin; "he neither sees nor hears us any longer."

"Let us go to his *atelier*," said the wonder-struck young man.

"Oh! the old dragon has guarded the entrance. His treasure is out of our reach. I have not waited for your wish or urging to attempt an assault on the mystery."

"Mystery! then there is a mystery?"

"Yes," answered Porbus. "Frenhofer was the only pupil Mabuse was willing to teach. He became the friend, saviour, father of that unhappy man, and he sacrificed the greater part of his wealth to satisfy the mad passions of his master. In return, Mabuse bequeathed to him the secret of relief, the power of giving life to form,—that flower of nature, our perpetual despair, which Mabuse had seized so well that once, having sold and drunk the value of a flowered damask which he should have worn at the entrance of Charles V., he made his appearance in a paper garment painted to resemble damask. The splendor of the stuff attracted the attention of the emperor, who, wishing to compliment the old drunkard, laid a hand upon his shoulder and discovered the deception. Frenhofer is a man carried away by the passion of his art; he sees above and beyond what other painters see. He has meditated deeply on color and the absolute truth of lines; but by dint of much research, much thought, much study, he has come to doubt the object for which he is searching. In his hours of despair he fancies that drawing does not exist, and that lines can render nothing but geometric figures. That, of course, is not true; because with a black line which has no color we can represent the human form. This proves that our

art is made up, like nature, of an infinite number of elements. Drawing gives the skeleton, and color gives the life; but life without the skeleton is a far more incomplete thing than the skeleton without the life. But there is a higher truth still, — namely, that practice and observation are the essentials of a painter; and that if reason and poesy persist in wrangling with the tools, the brushes, we shall be brought to doubt, like Frenhofer, who is as much excited in brain as he is exalted in art. A sublime painter, indeed; but he had the misfortune to be born rich, and that enables him to stray into theory and conjecture. Do not imitate him. Work! work! painters should theorize with their brushes in their hands."

"We will contrive to get in," cried Poussin, not listening to Porbus, and thinking only of the hidden masterpiece.

Porbus smiled at the youth's enthusiasm, and bade him farewell with a kindly invitation to come and visit him.

Nicolas Poussin returned slowly towards the Rue de la Harpe and passed, without observing that he did so, the modest hostelry where he was lodging. Returning presently upon his steps, he ran up the miserable stairway with anxious rapidity until he reached an upper chamber nestling between the joists of a roof *en colombage*,— the plain, slight covering of the houses of old Paris. Near the single and gloomy window of the room sat a young girl, who rose quickly as the door opened, with a gesture of love; she had recognized the young man's touch upon the latch.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"It is — it is," he cried, choking with joy, "that I feel myself a painter! I have doubted it till now; but to-day I believe in myself. I can be a great man. Ah, Gillette, we shall be rich, happy! There is gold in these brushes!"

Suddenly he became silent. His grave and earnest face lost its expression of joy; he was comparing the immensity of his hopes with the mediocrity of his means. The walls of the garret were covered with bits of paper on which were crayon sketches; he possessed only four clean canvases. Colors were at that time costly, and the poor gentleman gazed at a palette that was wellnigh bare. In the midst of this poverty he felt within himself an indescribable wealth of heart and the superabundant force of consuming genius. Brought to Paris by a gentleman of his acquaintance, and perhaps by the monition of his own talent, he had suddenly found a mistress,— one of those generous and noble souls who are ready to suffer by the side of a great man; espousing his poverty, studying to comprehend his caprices, strong to bear deprivation and bestow love, as others are daring in the display of luxury and in parading the insensibility of their hearts. The smile which flickered on her lips brightened as with gold the darkness of the garret and rivalled the effulgence of the skies; for the sun did not always shine in the heavens, but she was always here, — calm and collected in her passion, living in his happiness, his griefs; sustaining the genius which overflowed in love ere it found in art its destined expression.

"Listen, Gillette; come!"

The obedient, happy girl sprang lightly on the painter's knee. She was all grace and beauty, pretty as the

spring-time, decked with the wealth of feminine charm, and lighting all with the fire of a noble soul.

"O God!" he exclaimed, "I can never tell her!"

"A secret!" she cried; "then I must know it."

Poussin was lost in thought.

"Tell me."

"Gillette, poor, beloved heart!"

"Ah! do you want something of me?"

"Yes."

"If you want me to pose as I did the other day," she said, with a little pouting air, "I will not do it. Your eyes say nothing to me, then. You look at me, but you do not think of me."

"Would you like me to copy another woman?"

"Perhaps," she answered, "if she were very ugly."

"Well," continued Poussin, in a grave tone, "if to make me a great painter it were necessary to pose to some one else — "

"You are testing me," she interrupted; "you know well that I would not do it."

Poussin bent his head upon his breast like a man succumbing to joy or grief too great for his spirit to bear.

"Listen," she said, pulling him by the sleeve of his worn doublet, "I told you, Nick, that I would give my life for you; but I never said — never! — that I, a living woman, would renounce my love."

"Renounce it?" cried Poussin.

"If I showed myself thus to another you would love me no longer; and I myself, I should feel unworthy of your love. To obey your caprices, ah, that is simple and natural! in spite of myself, I am proud and happy in doing thy dear will; but to another, fy!"

"Forgive me, my own Gillette," said the painter, throwing himself at her feet. "I would rather be loved than famous. To me thou art more precious than fortune and honors. Yes, away with these brushes! burn those sketches! I have been mistaken. My vocation is to love thee, — thee alone! I am not a painter, I am thy lover. Perish art and all its secrets!"

She looked at him admiringly, happy and captivated by his passion. She reigned; she felt instinctively that the arts were forgotten for her sake, and flung at her feet like grains of incense.

"Yet he is only an old man," resumed Poussin. "In you he would see only a woman. You are the perfect woman whom he seeks."

"Love should grant all things!" she exclaimed, ready to sacrifice love's scruples to reward the lover who thus seemed to sacrifice his art to her. "And yet," she added, "it would be my ruin. Ah, to suffer for thy good! Yes, it is glorious! But thou wilt forget me. How came this cruel thought into thy mind?"

"It came there, and yet I love thee," he said, with a sort of contrition. "Am I, then, a wretch?"

"Let us consult Père Hardouin."

"No, no! it must be a secret between us."

"Well, I will go; but thou must not be present," she said. "Stay at the door, armed with thy dagger. If I cry out, enter and kill the man."

Forgetting all but his art, Poussin clasped her in his arms.

"He loves me no longer!" thought Gillette, when she was once more alone.

She regretted her promise. But before long she fell a prey to an anguish far more cruel than her regret; and she struggled vainly to drive forth a terrible fear which forced its way into her mind. She felt that she loved him less as the suspicion rose in her heart that he was less worthy than she had thought him.

II.

Three months after the first meeting of Porbus and Poussin, the former went to see Maître Frenhofer. He found the old man a prey to one of those deep, self-developed discouragements, whose cause, if we are to believe the mathematicians of health, lies in a bad digestion, in the wind, in the weather, in some swelling of the intestines, or else, according to casuists, in the imperfections of our moral nature; the fact being that the good man was simply worn out by the effort to complete his mysterious picture. He was seated languidly in a large oaken chair of vast dimensions covered with black leather; and without changing his melancholy attitude he cast on Porbus the distant glance of a man sunk in absolute dejection.

"Well, maître," said Porbus, "was the ultra-marine, for which you journeyed to Brussels, worthless? Are you unable to grind our new white? Is the oil bad, or the brushes restive?"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "I thought for one moment that my work was accomplished; but I must have deceived myself in some of the details. I shall have no peace until I clear up my doubts. I am about to travel; I go to Turkey, Asia, Greece, in search of models. I must compare my picture with various types of Nature. It may be that I have up *there*," he added, letting a smile of satisfaction flicker on his lip, "Nature

herself. At times I am half afraid that a breath may wake this woman, and that she will disappear from sight."

He rose suddenly, as if to depart at once. "Wait," exclaimed Porbus. "I have come in time to spare you the costs and fatigues of such a journey."

"How so?" asked Frenhofer, surprised.

"Young Poussin is beloved by a woman whose incomparable beauty is without imperfection. But, my dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, at least you must let us see your picture."

The old man remained standing, motionless, in a state bordering on stupefaction. "What!" he at last exclaimed, mournfully. "Show my creature, my spouse? —tear off the veil with which I have chastely hidden my joy? It would be prostitution! For ten years I have lived with this woman; she is mine, mine alone! she loves me! Has she not smiled upon me as, touch by touch, I painted her? She has a soul,—the soul with which I endowed her. She would blush if other eyes than mine beheld her. Let her be seen?—where is the husband, the lover, so debased as to lend his wife to dishonor? When you paint a picture for the court you do not put your whole soul into it; you sell to courtiers your tricked-out lay-figures. My painting is not a picture; it is a sentiment, a passion! Born in my *atelier*, she must remain a virgin there. She shall not leave it unclothed. Poesy and women give themselves bare, like truth, to lovers only. Have we the model of Raphael, the Angelica of Ariosto, the Beatrice of Dante? No, we see but their semblance. Well, the work which I keep hidden behind bolts and bars is an exception to

all other art. It is not a canvas; it is a woman, — a woman with whom I weep and laugh and think and talk. Would you have me resign the joy of ten years, as I might throw away a worn-out doublet? Shall I, in a moment, cease to be father, lover, creator? — this woman is not a creature; she is my creation. Bring your young man; I will give him my treasures, — paintings of Correggio, Michel-Angelo, Titian; I will kiss the print of his feet in the dust, — but make him my rival? Shame upon me! Ha! I am more a lover than I am a painter. I shall have the strength to burn my Nut-girl ere I render my last sigh; but suffer her to endure the glance of a man, a young man, a painter? — No, no! I would kill on the morrow the man who polluted her with a look! I would kill you, — you, my friend, — if you did not worship her on your knees; and think you I would submit my idol to the cold eyes and stupid criticisms of fools? Ah, love is a mystery! its life is in the depths of the soul; it dies when a man says, even to his friend, Here is she whom I love."

The old man seemed to renew his youth; his eyes had the brilliancy and fire of life, his pale cheeks blushed a vivid red, his hands trembled. Porbus, amazed by the passionate violence with which he uttered these words, knew not how to answer a feeling so novel and yet so profound. Was the old man under the thraldom of an artist's fancy? Or did these ideas flow from the unspeakable fanaticism produced at times in every mind by the long gestation of a noble work? Was it possible to bargain with this strange and whimsical being?

Filled with such thoughts, Porbus said to the old man, "Is it not woman for woman? Poussin lends his mistress to your eyes."

"What sort of mistress is that?" cried Frenhofer. "She will betray him sooner or later. Mine will be to me forever faithful."

"Well," returned Porbus, "then let us say no more. But before you find, even in Asia, a woman as beautiful, as perfect, as the one I speak of, you may be dead, and your picture forever unfinished."

"Oh, it is finished!" said Frenhofer. "Whoever sees it will find a woman lying on a velvet bed, beneath curtains; perfumes are exhaling from a golden tripod by her side: he will be tempted to take the tassels of the cord that holds back the curtain; he will think he sees the bosom of Catherine Lescaut, — a model called the Beautiful Nut-girl; he will see it rise and fall with the movement of her breathing. Yet — I wish I could be sure — "

"Go to Asia, then," said Porbus hastily, fancying he saw some hesitation in the old man's eye.

Porbus made a few steps towards the door of the room. At this moment Gillette and Nicolas Poussin reached the entrance of the house. As the young girl was about to enter, she dropped the arm of her lover and shrank back as if overcome by a presentiment. "What am I doing here?" she said to Poussin, in a deep voice, looking at him fixedly.

"Gillette, I leave you mistress of your actions; I will obey your will. You are my conscience, my glory. Come home; I shall be happy, perhaps, if you, yourself — "

"Have I a self when you speak thus to me? Oh, no! I am but a child. Come," she continued, seeming to make a violent effort. "If our love perishes, if I put into my heart a long regret, thy fame shall be the guerdon of my obedience to thy will. Let us enter. I may yet live again, — a memory on thy palette."

Opening the door of the house the two lovers met Porbus coming out. Astonished at the beauty of the young girl, whose eyes were still wet with tears, he caught her all trembling by the hand and led her to the old master.

"There!" he cried; "is she not worth all the masterpieces in the world?"

Frenhofer quivered. Gillette stood before him in the ingenuous, simple attitude of a young Georgian, innocent and timid, captured by brigands and offered to a slave-merchant. A modest blush suffused her cheeks, her eyes were lowered, her hands hung at her sides, strength seemed to abandon her, and her tears protested against the violence done to her purity. Poussin cursed himself, and repented of his folly in bringing this treasure from their peaceful garret. Once more he became a lover rather than an artist; scruples convulsed his heart as he saw the eye of the old painter regain its youth and, with the artist's habit, disrobe as it were the beauteous form of the young girl. He was seized with the jealous frenzy of a true lover.

"Gillette!" he cried; "let us go."

At this cry, with its accent of love, his mistress raised her eyes joyfully and looked at him; then she ran into his arms.

"Ah! you love me still?" she whispered, bursting into tears.

Though she had had strength to hide her suffering, she had none to hide her joy.

"Let me have her for one moment," exclaimed the old master, "and you shall compare her with my Catherine. Yes, yes; I consent!"

There was love in the cry of Frenhofer as in that of Poussin, mingled with jealous coquetry on behalf of his semblance of a woman; he seemed to revel in the triumph which the beauty of his virgin was about to win over the beauty of the living woman.

"Do not let him retract," cried Porbus, striking Poussin on the shoulder. "The fruits of love wither in a day; those of art are immortal."

"Can it be," said Gillette, looking steadily at Poussin and at Porbus, "that I am nothing more than a woman to him?"

She raised her head proudly; and as she glanced at Frenhofer with flashing eyes she saw her lover gazing once more at the picture he had formerly taken for a Giorgione.

"Ah!" she cried, "let us go in; he never looked at me like that!"

"Old man!" said Poussin, roused from his meditation by Gillette's voice, "see this sword. I will plunge it into your heart at the first cry of that young girl. I will set fire to your house, and no one shall escape from it. Do you understand me?"

His look was gloomy and the tones of his voice were terrible. His attitude, and above all the gesture with which he laid his hand upon the weapon, comforted the poor girl, who half forgave him for thus sacrificing her to his art and to his hopes of a glorious future.

Porbus and Poussin remained outside the closed door of the *atelier*, looking at one another in silence. At first the painter of the Egyptian Mary uttered a few exclamations: "Ah, she unclothes herself!" — "He tells her to stand in the light!" — "He compares them!" but he grew silent as he watched the mournful face of the young man; for though old painters have none of such petty scruples in presence of their art, yet they admire them in others, when they are fresh and pleasing. The young man held his hand on his sword, and his ear seemed glued to the panel of the door. Both men, standing darkly in the shadow, looked like conspirators waiting the hour to strike a tyrant.

"Come in! come in!" cried the old man, beaming with happiness. "My work is perfect; I can show it now with pride. Never shall painter, brushes, colors, canvas, light, produce the rival of Catherine Lescaut, the Beautiful Nut-girl."

Porbus and Poussin, seized with wild curiosity, rushed into the middle of a vast *atelier* filled with dust, where everything lay in disorder, and where they saw a few paintings hanging here and there upon the walls. They stopped before the figure of a woman, life-sized and half nude, which filled them with eager admiration.

"Do not look at that," said Frenhofer, "it is only a daub which I made to study a pose; it is worth nothing. Those are my errors," he added, waving his hand towards the enchanting compositions on the walls around them.

At these words Porbus and Poussin, amazed at the disdain which the master showed for such marvels of art, looked about them for the secret treasure, but could see it nowhere.

"There it is!" said the old man, whose hair fell in disorder about his face, which was scarlet with supernatural excitement. His eyes sparkled, and his breast heaved like that of a young man beside himself with love.

"Ah!" he cried, "you did not expect such perfection? You stand before a woman, and you are looking for a picture! There are such depths on that canvas, the air within it is so true, that you are unable to distinguish it from the air you breathe. Where is art? Departed, vanished! Here is the form itself of a young girl. Have I not caught the color, the very life of the line which seems to terminate the body? The same phenomenon which we notice around fishes in the water is also about objects which float in air. See how these outlines spring forth from the background. Do you not feel that you could pass your hand behind those shoulders? For seven years have I studied these effects of light coupled with form. That hair,—is it not bathed in light? Why, she breathes! That bosom, — see! Ah! who would not worship it on bended knee? The flesh palpitates! Wait, she is about to rise; wait!"

"Can you see anything?" whispered Poussin to Porbus.

"Nothing. Can you?"

"No."

The two painters drew back, leaving the old man absorbed in ecstasy, and tried to see if the light, falling plumb upon the canvas at which he pointed, had neutralized all effects. They examined the picture, moving from right to left, standing directly before it, bending, swaying, rising by turns.

"Yes, yes; it is really a canvas," cried Frenhofer, mistaking the purpose of their examination. "See, here is the frame, the easel; these are my colors, my brushes." And he caught up a brush which he held out to them with a naïve motion.

"The old rogue is making game of us," said Poussin, coming close to the pretended picture. "I can see nothing here but a mass of confused color, crossed by a multitude of eccentric lines, making a sort of painted wall."

"We are mistaken. See!" returned Porbus.

Coming nearer, they perceived in a corner of the canvas the point of a naked foot, which came forth from the chaos of colors, tones, shadows hazy and undefined, misty and without form,—an enchanting foot, a living foot. They stood lost in admiration before this glorious fragment breaking forth from the incredible, slow, progressive destruction around it. The foot seemed to them like the torso of some Grecian Venus, brought to light amid the ruins of a burned city.

"There is a woman beneath it all!" cried Porbus, calling Poussin's attention to the layers of color which the old painter had successively laid on, believing that he thus brought his work to perfection. The two men turned towards him with one accord, beginning to comprehend, though vaguely, the ecstasy in which he lived.

"He means it in good faith," said Porbus.

"Yes, my friend," answered the old man, rousing from his abstraction, "we need faith; faith in art. We must live with our work for years before we can produce a creation like that. Some of these shadows have

cost me endless toil. See, there on her cheek, below the eyes, a faint half-shadow; if you observed it in Nature you might think it could hardly be rendered. Well, believe me, I took unheard-of pains to reproduce that effect. My dear Porbus, look attentively at my work, and you will comprehend what I have told you about the manner of treating form and outline. Look at the light on the bosom, and see how by a series of touches and higher lights firmly laid on I have managed to grasp light itself, and combine it with the dazzling whiteness of the clearer tones; and then see how, by an opposite method,—smoothing off the sharp contrasts and the texture of the color,—I have been able, by caressing the outline of my figure and veiling it with cloudy half-tints, to do away with the very idea of drawing and all other artificial means, and give to the form the aspect and roundness of Nature itself. Come nearer, and you will see the work more distinctly; if too far off it disappears. See! there, at that point, it is, I think, most remarkable." And with the end of his brush he pointed to a spot of clear light color.

Porbus struck the old man on the shoulder, turning to Poussin as he did so, and said, "Do you know that he is one of our greatest painters?"

"He is a poet even more than he is a painter," answered Poussin gravely.

"There," returned Porbus, touching the canvas, "is the ultimate end of our art on earth."

"And from thence," added Poussin, "it rises, to enter heaven."

"How much happiness is there!—upon that canvas," said Porbus.

The absorbed old man gave no heed to their words; he was smiling at his visionary woman.

"But sooner or later, he will perceive that there is nothing there," cried Poussin.

"Nothing there! — upon my canvas?" said Frenhofer, looking first at the two painters, and then at his imaginary picture.

"What have you done?" cried Porbus, addressing Poussin.

The old man seized the arm of the young man violently, and said to him, "You see nothing? — clown, infidel, scoundrel, dolt! Why did you come here? My good Porbus," he added, turning to his friend, "is it possible that you, too, are jesting with me? Answer; I am your friend. Tell me, can it be that I have spoiled my picture?"

Porbus hesitated, and feared to speak; but the anxiety painted on the white face of the old man was so cruel that he was constrained to point to the canvas and utter the word, "See!"

Frenhofer looked at his picture for the space of a moment, and staggered.

"Nothing! nothing! after toiling ten years!"

He sat down and wept.

"Am I then a fool, an idiot? Have I neither talent nor capacity? Am I no better than a rich man who walks, and can only walk? Have I indeed produced nothing?"

He gazed at the canvas through tears. Suddenly he raised himself proudly and flung a lightning glance upon the two painters.

"By the blood, by the body, by the head of Christ, you are envious men who seek to make me think she is

spoiled, that you may steal her from me. I — I see her!" he cried. "She is wondrously beautiful!"

At this moment Poussin heard the weeping of Gillette as she stood, forgotten, in a corner.

"What troubles thee, my darling?" asked the painter, becoming once more a lover.

"Kill me!" she answered. "I should be infamous if I still loved thee, for I despise thee. I admire thee; but thou hast filled me with horror. I love, and yet already I hate thee."

While Poussin listened to Gillette, Frenhofer drew a green curtain before his Catherine, with the grave composure of a jeweller locking his drawers when he thinks that thieves are near him. He cast at the two painters a look which was profoundly dissimulating, full of contempt and suspicion; then, with convulsive haste, he silently pushed them through the door of his *atelier*. When they reached the threshold of his house he said to them, "Adieu, my little friends."

The tone of this farewell chilled the two painters with fear.

On the morrow Porbus, alarmed, went again to visit Frenhofer, and found that he had died during the night, after having burned his paintings.